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HAZLITT

Characters of Shakespear's Plays

&

Lectures on The English Poets

By William Hazlitt

London
Macmillan and Co. Limited
New York : The Macmillan Company
1903

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE essays on *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* and *Lectures on the English Poets* here printed were first published, the former in 1817, the latter in the following year. They were succeeded in 1819 by the Lectures on *English Comic Writers*, and in 1821 by those on the *Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Elizabeth.* It is the opinion of some good critics—Professor Saintsbury is one of them—that in these four volumes, issued in this rapid succession, we have Hazlitt "at his best." From his other writings passages of greater brilliancy may be picked out, but nowhere is his excellence more sustained, or his judgment less warped by his rather numerous prejudices.

Both the *Characters* and the *Lectures on the English Poets* offer interesting materials for a Bibliographical Note. Mr. Augustine Birrell has recently pointed out in his life of Hazlitt in Macmillan's *English Men of Letters*,[1] that, although not usually connected with Hazlitt's stage criticisms, no inconsiderable part of the *Characters*, and that part the best, consists of extracts from his criticisms of Kean and Kemble bodily uplifted from the *Chronicle*, the *Champion*, and the *Examiner.*

[1] William Hazlitt. By Augustine Birrell, 1902, pp. 105, 106.

"It is only necessary," Mr. Birrell writes, "to compare the Macbeth of the *Characters* with the criticism of Mr. Kean's Macbeth that appeared in the *Champion* of November 13, 1814; the Othello of the *Characters* with the criticism of Mr. Kean's Othello that appeared in the *Examiner* of July 24, 1814, and January 7, 1816; the Coriolanus of the *Characters* with the criticism of Mr. Kemble's Coriolanus that appeared in the *Examiner* of December 15, 1816; and to do the same with the Hamlet and Midsummer Night's Dream of the *Characters* with the *Chronicle* of March 14, 1814, and the *Examiner* of January 21, 1816, to see clearly that but for the newspapers and Kean, Hazlitt would never have written his *Characters*."

Having thus been able to use, not to his reader's disadvantage, some of his old materials, Hazlitt was probably very well satisfied when on taking his manuscript to the printer of the *Examiner*, C. H. Reynell, he received an offer of £100 for the entire copyright. Reynell employed Hunter of St. Paul's Churchyard and C. & J. Ollier of Welbeck Street to sell the book for him, and it must have been published about the beginning of July, since the first of three advertisements in the *Times* was published on the eighth of that month. In October new advertisements appeared in the *Times*, probably for the sake of quoting from the *Edinburgh Review*:—[1]

"This is a very pleasing book, and we do not hesitate to say a book of very considerable originality and genius. What we chiefly look for in such a work is a fine sense of the beauties of the author, and an eloquent exposition of them, and all this and more may be found in the volume before us."

No doubt this very just criticism helped the sale of the book, but as it was natural in those days for the *Edinburgh* to praise Hazlitt as one of its contributors, so it was natural for the *Quarterly* to hold him up to ridicule, and in the number for January, 1818, Gifford executed his task

[1] The criticism appeared in the 'August' number, but this appears to have been very late in coming out.

with his accustomed skill. Hazlitt had alluded to Thomas Whately's essay in Shakesperean criticism as written by 'a gentleman of the name of Mason'; [1] he had used a few phrases ('logical diagrams,' 'caught in the web of,' etc.) once oftener than Mr. Gifford thought right; he had said in one place, 'it is *we* who are Hamlet'; and in another, 'the interest in Hamlet is more remote and reflex'; he had misquoted a passage and bungled an allusion. For these sins (and sins they are, though they leave the merits of the book untouched), as well as for the weightier one of being the work of William Hazlitt, who was neither a Tory nor a Churchman, the *Characters* were dismissed as beneath contempt. In *A Letter to William Gifford, Esq.* (1819), Hazlitt subsequently taught the eminent critic that it was safer to leave his books alone. But in his own mind a myth grew up which has been dutifully accepted by all his biographers. He informed his friends that Taylor and Hessey told him subsequently that the booksellers "had sold nearly two editions in about three months, but after the *Quarterly* review of them came out, they never sold another copy," or, with some variations.

"My book sold well—the first edition had gone off in six weeks—till that review came out. I had just prepared a second edition, but then the *Quarterly* told the public that I was a fool and a dunce; and more, that I was an evil-disposed person; and the public, supposing Gifford to know best, confessed it had been a great ass to be pleased where it ought not to be, and the sale completely stopped" (*Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, by W. C. Hazlitt, vol. I., p. 228 *sq.*).

A firm belief that good books, though they may not find a very large public ready for them, are never killed by a

[1] There was some excuse for this blunder, since Whately's *Remarks on some of the characters of Shakespeare* were at first published anonymously, and George Mason resembled him in writing both on poetry and on gardening.

hostile review, prompted the present writer to examine this legend with the aid of contemporary advertisements, and the facts show that Hazlitt's imagination had run away with him. As we have seen, the first edition was published early in July ; three months later the publishers were trying to help it by fresh advertisements ; Gifford's review appeared in January, 1818, and it was not until some four months after this, *i.e.* early in May, that the second edition was brought out, simultaneously with the issue of the *Lectures on the English Poets.* As the book was published at half a guinea, it had not done badly to reach a second edition in ten months ; but its original success was far less rapid than Hazlitt imagined, and Gifford's attack probably did no great harm. The second edition was published for Reynell by Taylor and Hessey, and as the last revised by Hazlitt has been followed in this reprint.

The *Lectures on the English Poets, delivered at the Surrey Institution*, which appeared simultaneously with the second edition of the *Characters*, were also published by Taylor and Hessey and at the same price, half a guinea. Hazlitt had procured an introduction to the Secretary of the Institution from a member of the Committee, and according to his grandson (*Memoirs*, I. 235) began his interview by remarking that he had not written any part of the proposed lectures, but had thought of them, and suggested that a portion of the proposed fee might be paid in advance. Despite this not very promising opening the proposal was accepted and the lectures given, early in 1818, to the rather motley audiences which lectures on winter evenings in the Blackfriars Road could attract. According to Talfourd (*Literary Remains*, I. cxxvi.) :

"They consisted chiefly of dissenters, who agreed with him in his hatred

of Lord Castlereagh, but who 'loved no plays'; of Quakers, who approved him as the opponent of slavery and capital punishment, but who 'heard no music'; of citizens, devoted to the main chance, who had a hankering after 'the improvement of the mind,' but to whom his favourite doctrine of its natural disinterestedness was a riddle; of a few enemies, who came to sneer; and a few friends, who were eager to learn and to admire. . . . When he read a well-known extract from Cowper, comparing a poor cottager with Voltaire, and had pronounced the line 'a truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew,' they broke out into a joyous shout of self-gratulation that they were so much wiser than a wicked Frenchman. When he passed by Mrs. Hannah More with observing that 'she had written a great deal which he had never read' a voice gave expression to the general commiseration and surprise by calling out, 'More pity for you.'"

The lectures were reviewed, or rather epitomised, by Mr. P. G. Patmore in articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* for February, March, and April. In the *Times* for March 23rd, 1818, there is an advertisement beginning "This evening at the Crown and Anchor Tavern Mr. Hazlitt will commence a course of lectures on English Poets," so that it would seem that the lectures were repeated before a different audience, a fact which I have not found mentioned elsewhere. As two lectures were to be given at the Crown and Anchor each week, the course would have finished in the latter half of April, and the lectures were published in book form within about a fortnight of the delivery of the last of them. They enjoyed just the same amount of immediate success as the *Characters*, reaching a second edition in 1819, after which no reprint was called for during the author's life. The text, therefore, of this edition follows that of 1819.

ALFRED W. POLLARD.

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TO

CHARLES LAMB, Esq.

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED, AS A MARK

OF OLD FRIENDSHIP AND LASTING

ESTEEM, BY THE AUTHOR

PREFACE TO CHARACTERS OF SHAKESPEAR'S PLAYS.

It is observed by Mr. Pope, that "If ever any author deserved the name of an *original*, it was Shakespear. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; it proceeded through Ægyptian strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him. The poetry of Shakespear was inspiration: indeed, he is not so much an imitator, as an instrument of nature; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks through him.

"His *characters* are so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shews that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image: each picture, like a mock-rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakespear, is as much an individual, as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such, as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of character, we must add the wonderful preservation of it; which is such throughout his plays, that had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the

persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker."

The object of the volume here offered to the public, is to illustrate these remarks in a more particular manner by a reference to each play. A gentleman of the name of Mason, the author of a Treatise on Ornamental Gardening, (not Mason the poet) began a work of a similar kind about forty years ago, but he only lived to finish a parallel between the characters of Macbeth and Richard III. which is an exceedingly ingenious piece of analytical criticism. Richardson's Essays include but a few of Shakespear's principal characters. The only work which seemed to supersede the necessity of an attempt like the present was Schlegel's very admirable Lectures on the Drama, which give by far the best account of the plays of Shakespear that has hitherto appeared. The only circumstances in which it was thought not impossible to improve on the manner in which the German critic has executed this part of his design, were in avoiding an appearance of mysticism in his style, not very attractive to the English reader, and in bringing illustrations from particular passages of the plays themselves, of which Schlegel's work, from the extensiveness of his plan, did not admit. We will at the same time confess, that some little jealousy of the character of the national understanding was not without its share in producing the following undertaking, for "we were piqued" that it should be reserved for a foreign critic to give "reasons for the faith which we English have in Shakespear." Certainly no writer among ourselves has shewn either the same enthusiastic admiration of his genius, or the same philosophical acuteness in pointing out his characteristic excellences. As we have pretty well exhausted all we had to say upon this subject in the body of the work, we shall here transcribe Schlegel's general account of Shakespear, which is in the following words :—

"Never, perhaps, was there so comprehensive a talent for the delineation of character as Shakespear's. It not only grasps the diversities of rank, sex, and age, down to the dawnings of infancy ; not only do the king and the

beggar, the hero and the pickpocket, the sage and the idiot speak and act with equal truth ; not only does he transport himself to distant ages and foreign nations, and pourtray in the most accurate manner, with only a few apparent violations of costume, the spirit of the ancient Romans, of the French in their wars with the English, of the English themselves during a great part of their history, of the Southern Europeans (in the serious part of many comedies), the cultivated society of that time, and the former rude and barbarous state of the North ; his human characters have not only such depth and precision that they cannot be arranged under classes, and are inexhaustible, even in conception :—no—this Prometheus not merely forms men, he opens the gates of the magical world of spirits ; calls up the midnight ghost ; exhibits before us his witches amidst their unhallowed mysteries ; peoples the air with sportive fairies and sylphs :—and these beings, existing only in imagination, possess such truth and consistency, that even when deformed monsters like Caliban, he extorts the conviction, that if there should be such beings, they would so conduct themselves. In a word, as he carries with him the most fruitful and daring fancy into the kingdom of nature,—on the other hand, he carries nature into the regions of fancy, lying beyond the confines of reality. We are lost in astonishment at seeing the extraordinary, the wonderful, and the unheard of, in such intimate nearness.

"If Shakespear deserves our admiration for his characters, he is equally deserving of it for his exhibition of passion, taking this word in its widest signification, as including every mental condition, every tone from indifference or familiar mirth to the wildest rage and despair. He gives us the history of minds ; he lays open to us, in a single word, a whole series of preceding conditions. His passions do not at first stand displayed to us in all their height, as is the case with so many tragic poets, who, in the language of Lessing, are thorough masters of the legal style of love. He paints, in a most inimitable manner, the gradual progress from the first

origin. "He gives," as Lessing says, "a living picture of all the most minute and secret artifices by which a feeling steals into our souls; of all the imperceptible advantages which it there gains; of all the stratagems by which every other passion is made subservient to it, till it becomes the sole tyrant of our desires and our aversions." Of all poets, perhaps, he alone has pourtrayed the mental diseases,—melancholy, delirium, lunacy,—with such inexpressible, and, in every respect, definite truth, that the physician may enrich his observations from them in the same manner as from real cases.

"And yet Johnson has objected to Shakespear, that his pathos is not always natural and free from affectation. There are, it is true, passages, though comparatively speaking, very few, where his poetry exceeds the bounds of true dialogue, where a too soaring imagination, a too luxuriant wit, rendered the complete dramatic forgetfulness of himself impossible. With this exception, the censure originates only in a fanciless way of thinking, to which everything appears unnatural that does not suit its own tame insipidity. Hence, an idea has been formed of simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery, and nowise elevated above every-day life. But energetical passions electrify the whole of the mental powers, and will, consequently, in highly favoured natures, express themselves in an ingenious and figurative manner. It has been often remarked, that indignation gives wit; and, as despair occasionally breaks out into laughter, it may sometimes also give vent to itself in antithetical comparisons.

"Besides, the rights of the poetical form have not been duly weighed. Shakespear, who was always sure of his object, to move in a sufficiently powerful manner when he wished to do so, has occasionally, by indulging in a freer play, purposely moderated the impressions when too painful, and immediately introduced a musical alleviation of our sympathy. He had not those rude ideas of his art which many moderns seem to have, as if the poet, like the clown in the proverb, must strike twice on the same

place. An ancient rhetorician delivered a caution against dwelling too long on the excitation of pity ; for nothing, he said, dries so soon as tears ; and Shakespear acted conformably to this ingenious maxim, without knowing it.

" The objection, that Shakespear wounds our feelings by the open display of the most disgusting moral odiousness, harrows up the mind unmercifully, and tortures even our senses by the exhibition of the most insupportable and hateful spectacles, is one of much greater importance. He has never, in fact, varnished over wild and bloodthirsty passions with a pleasing exterior,—never clothed crime and want of principle with a false show of greatness of soul ; and in that respect he is every way deserving of praise. Twice he has pourtrayed downright villains ; and the masterly way in which he has contrived to elude impressions of too painful a nature, may be seen in Iago and Richard the Third. The constant reference to a petty and puny race must cripple the boldness of the poet. Fortunately for his art, Shakespear lived in an age extremely susceptible of noble and tender impressions, but which had still enough of the firmness inherited from a vigorous olden time not to shrink back with dismay from every strong and violent picture. We have lived to see tragedies of which the catastrophe consists in the swoon of an enamoured princess. If Shakespear falls occasionally into the opposite extreme, it is a noble error, originating in the fulness of a gigantic strength : and yet this tragical Titan, who storms the heavens, and threatens to tear the world from off its hinges ; who, more terrible than Æschylus, makes our hair stand on end, and congeals our blood with horror, possessed, at the same time, the insinuating loveliness of the sweetest poetry. He plays with love like a child ; and his songs are breathed out like melting sighs. [He unites in his genius the utmost elevation and the utmost depth ; and the most foreign, and even apparently irreconcileable properties subsist in him peaceably together. The world of spirits and nature have laid all her treasures at his feet. In strength a demigod, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom

a protecting spirit of a higher order, he lowers himself to mortals, as if unconscious of his superiority: and is as open and unassuming as a child.

"Shakespear's comic talent is equally wonderful with that which he has shown in the pathetic and tragic: it stands on an equal elevation, and possesses equal extent and profundity. All that I before wished was, not to admit that the former preponderated. He is highly inventive in comic situations and motives. It will be hardly possible to show whence he has taken any of them; whereas, in the serious part of his drama, he has generally laid hold of something already known. His comic characters are equally true, various, and profound, with his serious. So little is he disposed to caricature, that we may rather say many of his traits are almost too nice and delicate for the stage, that they can only be properly seized by a great actor, and fully understood by a very acute audience. Not only has he delineated many kinds of folly; he has also contrived to exhibit mere stupidity in a most diverting and entertaining manner." Vol. ii. p. 145.

We have the rather availed ourselves of this testimony of a foreign critic in behalf of Shakespear, because our own countryman, Dr. Johnson, has not been so favourable to him. It may be said of Shakespear, that "those who are not for him are against him": for indifference is here the height of injustice. We may sometimes, in order "to do a great right, do a little wrong." An overstrained enthusiasm is more pardonable with respect to Shakespear than the want of it; for our admiration cannot easily surpass his genius. We have a high respect for Dr. Johnson's character and understanding, mixed with something like personal attachment: but he was neither a poet nor a judge of poetry. He might in one sense be a judge of poetry as it falls within the limits and rules of prose, but not as it is poetry. Least of all was he qualified to be a judge of Shakespear, who "alone is high fantastical." Let those who have a prejudice against Johnson read Boswell's Life of him: as those whom he

has prejudiced against Shakespear should read his *Irene*. We do not say that a man to be a critic must necessarily be a poet: but to be a good critic, he ought not to be a bad poet. Such poetry as a man deliberately writes, such, and such only will he like. Dr. Johnson's Preface to his edition of Shakespear looks like a laborious attempt to bury the characteristic merits of his author under a load of cumbrous phraseology, and to weigh his excellences and defects in equal scales, stuffed full of "swelling figures and sonorous epithets." Nor could it well be otherwise; Dr. Johnson's general powers of reasoning overlaid his critical susceptibility. All his ideas were cast in a given mould, in a set form: they were made out by rule and system, by climax, inference, and antithesis:—Shakespear's were the reverse. Johnson's understanding dealt only in round numbers: the fractions were lost upon him. He reduced everything to the common standard of conventional propriety; and the most exquisite refinement or sublimity produced an effect on his mind, only as they could be translated into the language of measured prose. To him an excess of beauty was a fault; for it appeared to him like an excrescence; and his imagination was dazzled by a blaze of light. His writings neither shone with the beams of native genius, nor reflected them. The shifting shapes of fancy, the rainbow hues of things, made no impression on him: he seized only on the permanent and tangible. He had no idea of natural objects but "such as he could measure with a two-foot rule, or tell upon ten fingers": he judged of human nature in the same way, by mood and figure: he saw only the definite, the positive, and the practical, the average forms of things, not their striking differences—their classes, not their degrees. He was a man of strong common sense and practical wisdom, rather than of genius or feeling. He retained the regular habitual impressions of actual objects, but he could not follow the rapid flights of fancy, or the strong movements of passion. That is, he was to the poet what the painter of still life is to the painter of history. Common sense sympathizes with the

impressions of things on ordinary minds in ordinary circumstances: genius catches the glancing combinations presented to the eye of fancy, under the influence of passion. It is the province of the didactic reasoner to take cognizance of those results of human nature which are constantly repeated and always the same, which follow one another in regular succession, which are acted upon by large classes of men, and embodied in received customs, laws, language, and institutions; and it was in arranging, comparing, and arguing on these kind of general results, that Johnson's excellence lay. But he could not quit his hold of the common-place and mechanical, and apply the general rule to the particular exception, or shew how the nature of man was modified by the workings of passion, or the infinite fluctuations of thought and accident. Hence he could judge neither of the heights nor depths of poetry. Nor is this all; for being conscious of great powers in himself, and those powers of an adverse tendency to those of his author, he would be for setting up a foreign jurisdiction over poetry, and making criticism a kind of Procrustes' bed of genius, where he might cut down imagination to matter-of-fact, regulate the passions according to reason, and translate the whole into logical diagrams and rhetorical declamation. Thus he says of Shakespear's characters, in contradiction to what Pope had observed, and to what everyone else feels, that each character is a species, instead of being an individual. He in fact found the general species or *didactic* form in Shakespear's characters, which was all he sought or cared for; he did not find the individual traits, or the *dramatic* distinctions which Shakespear has engrafted on this general nature, because he felt no interest in them. Shakespear's bold and happy flights of imagination were equally thrown away upon our author. He was not only without any particular fineness of organic sensibility, alive to all the "mighty world of ear and eye," which is necessary to the painter or musician, but without that intenseness of passion, which, seeking to exaggerate whatever excites the feelings of pleasure or power in the mind,

and moulding the impressions of natural objects according to the impulses of imagination, produces a genius and a taste for poetry. According to Dr. Johnson, a mountain is sublime, or a rose is beautiful ; for that their name and definition imply. But he would no more be able to give the description of Dover cliff in *Lear*, or the description of flowers in *The Winter's Tale*, than to describe the objects of a sixth sense ; nor do we think he would have any very profound feeling of the beauty of the passages here referred to. A stately common-place, such as Congreve's description of a ruin in the *Mourning Bride*, would have answered Johnson's purpose just as well, or better than the first ; and an indiscriminate profusion of scents and hues would have interfered less with the ordinary routine of his imagination than Perdita's lines, which seem enamoured of their own sweetness—

> ———" Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty ; violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath."—

No one who does not feel the passion which these objects inspire can go along with the imagination which seeks to express that passion and the uneasy sense of delight accompanying it by something still more beautiful, and no one can feel this passionate love of nature without quick natural sensibility. To a mere literal and formal apprehension, the inimitably characteristic epithet, "violets *dim*," must seem to imply a defect, rather than a beauty ; and to any one, not feeling the full force of that epithet, which suggests an image like "the sleepy eye of love," the allusion to "the lids of Juno's eyes" must appear extravagant and unmeaning. Shakespear's fancy lent words and images to the most refined sensibility to nature, struggling for expression : his descriptions are identical with the things themselves, seen through the fine medium of passion : strip them of that connection, and try them by ordinary conceptions and ordinary rules, and they are as grotesque and barbarous as you please !—By thus

lowering Shakespear's genius to the standard of commonplace invention, it was easy to shew that his faults were as great as his beauties; for the excellence, which consists merely in a conformity to rules, is counterbalanced by the technical violation of them. Another circumstance which led to Dr. Johnson's indiscriminate praise or censure of Shakespear, is the very structure of his style. Johnson wrote a kind of rhyming prose, in which he was as much compelled to finish the different clauses of his sentences, and to balance one period against another, as the writer of heroic verse is to keep to lines of ten syllables with similar terminations. He no sooner acknowledges the merits of his author in one line than the periodical revolution of his style carries the weight of his opinion completely over to the side of objection, thus keeping up a perpetual alternation of perfections and absurdities. We do not otherwise know how to account for such assertions as the following:—"In his tragic scenes, there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy, for the greater part, by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct." Yet after saying that "his tragedy was skill," he affirms in the next page, "His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak, *for his power was the power of nature:* when he endeavoured, like other tragic writers, to catch opportunities of amplification, and instead of inquiring what the occasion demanded, to shew how much his stores of knowledge could supply, he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of his reader." Poor Shakespear! Between the charges here brought against him, of want of nature in the first instance, and of want of skill in the second, he could hardly escape being condemned. And again, "But the admirers of this great poet have most reason to complain when he approaches nearest to his highest excellence, and seems fully resolved to sink them in dejection, or mollify them with tender emotions by the fall of greatness, the danger of innocence, or the crosses of

love. What he does best, he soon ceases to do. He no sooner begins to move than he counteracts himself; and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity." In all this, our critic seems more bent on maintaining the equilibrium of his style than the consistency or truth of his opinions.—If Dr. Johnson's opinion was right, the following observations on Shakespear's Plays must be greatly exaggerated, if not ridiculous. If he was wrong, what has been said may perhaps account for his being so, without detracting from his ability and judgment in other things.

It is proper to add, that the account of the *Midsummer's Night's Dream* has appeared in another work.[1]

April 15, 1817.

[1] A few alterations and corrections have been inserted in the present edition. [Hazlitt's note. The other work to which he alludes is the *Round Table*. P.]

CHARACTERS OF SHAKESPEAR'S PLAYS

CYMBELINE

CYMBELINE is one of the most delightful of Shakespear's historical plays. It may be considered as a dramatic romance, in which the most striking parts of the story are thrown into the form of a dialogue, and the intermediate circumstances are explained by the different speakers, as occasion renders it necessary. The action is less concentrated in consequence; but the interest becomes more aerial and refined from the principle of perspective introduced into the subject by the imaginary changes of scene, as well as by the length of time it occupies. The reading of this play is like going a journey with some uncertain object at the end of it, and in which the suspense is kept up and heightened by the long intervals between each action. Though the events are scattered over such an extent of surface, and relate to such a variety of characters, yet the links which bind the different interests of the story together are never entirely broken. The most straggling and seemingly casual incidents are contrived in such a manner as to lead at last to the most complete development of the catastrophe. The ease and conscious unconcern with which this is effected only makes the skill more wonderful. The business of the plot evidently thickens in the last act: the story moves forward with increasing rapidity at every step; its various ramifications are drawn

from the most distant points to the same centre; the principal characters are brought together, and placed in very critical situations; and the fate of almost every person in the drama is made to depend on the solution of a single circumstance—the answer of Iachimo to the question of Imogen respecting the obtaining of the ring from Posthumus. Dr. Johnson is of opinion that Shakespear was generally inattentive to the winding-up of his plots. We think the contrary is true; and we might cite in proof of this remark not only the present play, but the conclusion of *Lear*, of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Macbeth*, of *Othello*, even of *Hamlet*, and of other plays of less moment, in which the last act is crowded with decisive events brought about by natural and striking means.

The pathos in CYMBELINE is not violent or tragical, but of the most pleasing and amiable kind. A certain tender gloom overspreads the whole. Posthumus is the ostensible hero of the piece, but its greatest charm is the character of Imogen. Posthumus is only interesting from the interest she takes in him; and she is only interesting herself from her tenderness and constancy to her husband. It is the peculiar excellence of Shakespear's heroines, that they seem to exist only in their attachment to others. They are pure abstractions of the affections. We think as little of their persons as they do themselves, because we are let into the secrets of their hearts, which are more important. We are too much interested in their affairs to stop to look at their faces, except by stealth and at intervals. No one ever hit the true perfection of the female character, the sense of weakness leaning on the strength of its affections for support, so well as Shakespear—no one ever so well painted natural tenderness free from affectation and disguise—no one else ever so well shewed how delicacy and timidity, when driven to extremity, grow romantic and extravagant; for the romance of his heroines (in which they abound) is only an excess of the habitual prejudices of their sex, scrupulous of being false to their vows, truant to their affections, and taught

by the force of feeling when to forego the forms of propriety for the essence of it. His women were in this respect exquisite logicians; for there is nothing so logical as passion. They knew their own minds exactly; and only followed up a favourite purpose, which they had sworn to with their tongues, and which was engraven on their hearts, into its untoward consequences. They were the prettiest little set of martyrs and confessors on record. —Cibber, in speaking of the early English stage, accounts for the want of prominence and theatrical display in Shakespear's female characters from the circumstance, that women in those days were not allowed to play the parts of women, which made it necessary to keep them a good deal in the back-ground. Does not this state of manners itself, which prevented their exhibiting themselves in public, and confined them to the relations and charities of domestic life, afford a truer explanation of the matter? His women are certainly very unlike stage-heroines; the reverse of tragedy-queens.

We have almost as great an affection for Imogen as she had for Posthumus; and she deserves it better. Of all Shakespear's women she is perhaps the most tender and the most artless. Her incredulity in the opening scene with Iachimo, as to her husband's infidelity, is much the same as Desdemona's backwardness to believe Othello's jealousy. Her answer to the most distressing part of the picture is only, "My lord, I fear, has forgot Britain." Her readiness to pardon Iachimo's false imputations and his designs against herself, is a good lesson to prudes; and may shew that where there is a real attachment to virtue, it has no need to bolster itself up with an outrageous or affected antipathy to vice. The scene in which Pisanio gives Imogen his master's letter, accusing her of incontinency on the treacherous suggestions of Iachimo, is as touching as it is possible for anything to be :—

> "*Pisanio.* What cheer, Madam?
> *Imogen.* False to his bed! What is it to be false?
> To lie in watch there, and to think on him?

To weep 'twixt clock and clock? If sleep charge nature,
To break it with a fearful dream of him,
And cry myself awake? That's false to's bed, is it?
Pisanio. Alas, good lady!
Imogen. I false? thy conscience witness, Iachimo,
Thou didst accuse him of incontinency,
Thou then look'dst like a villain: now methinks,
Thy favour's good enough. Some Jay of Italy,
Whose mother was her painting, hath betray'd him:
Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion,
And for I am richer than to hang by th' walls,
I must be ript; to pieces with me. Oh,
Men's vows are women's traitors. All good seeming
By thy revolt, oh husband, shall be thought
Put on for villainy: not born where't grows,
But worn a bait for ladies.
Pisanio. Good Madam, hear me—
Imogen. Talk thy tongue weary, speak:
I have heard I am a strumpet, and mine ear,
Therein false struck, can take no greater wound,
Nor tent to bottom that."——

When Pisanio, who had been charged to kill his mistress, puts her in a way to live, she says,

"Why, good fellow,
What shall I do the while? Where bide? How live?
Or in my life what comfort, when I am
Dead to my husband?"

Yet when he advises her to disguise herself in boy's clothes, and suggests "a course pretty and full in view," by which she may "happily be near the residence of Posthumus," she exclaims,

"Oh, for such means,
Though peril to my modesty, not death on't,
I would adventure."

And when Pisanio, enlarging on the consequences, tells her she must change

——— "Fear and niceness,
The handmaids of all women, or more truly,
Woman its pretty self, into a waggish courage,
Ready in gibes, quick-answer'd, saucy, and
As quarrellous as the weazel"———

she interrupts him hastily—

"Nay, be brief;
I see into thy end, and am almost
A man already."

In her journey thus disguised to Milford-Haven, she loses her guide and her way; and unbosoming her complaints, says beautifully—

——"My dear lord,
Thou art one of the false ones; now I think on thee,
My hunger's gone; but even before, I was
At point to sink for food."

She afterwards finds, as she thinks, the dead body of Posthumus, and engages herself as a footboy to serve a Roman officer, when she has done all due obsequies to him whom she calls her former master—

——"And when
With wild wood-leaves and weeds I ha' strew'd his grave,
And on it said a century of pray'rs,
Such as I can, twice o'er, I'll weep and sigh,
And leaving so his service, follow you,
So please you entertain me."

Now this is the very religion of love. She all along relies little on her personal charms, which she fears may have been eclipsed by some painted Jay of Italy; she relies on her merit, and her merit is in the depth of her love, her truth and constancy. Our admiration of her beauty is excited with as little consciousness as possible on her part. There are two delicious descriptions given of her, one when she is asleep, and one when she is supposed dead. Arviragus thus addresses her—

——"With fairest flowers,
While summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
I'll sweeten thy sad grave; thou shalt not lack
The flower that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azur'd hare-bell, like thy veins, no, nor
The leaf of eglantine, which not to slander,
Out-sweeten'd not thy breath."

The yellow Iachimo gives another thus, when he steals into her bedchamber:—

——"Cytherea,
How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! Fresh lily,
And whiter than the sheets! That I might touch—
But kiss, one kiss—'Tis her breathing that

> Perfumes the chamber thus : the flame o' th' taper
> Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
> To see th' enclosed lights now canopied
> Under the windows, white and azure, laced
> With blue of Heav'ns own tinct—on her left breast
> A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
> I' th' bottom of a cowslip."

There is a moral sense in the proud beauty of this last image, a rich surfeit of the fancy,—as that well-known passage beginning, "Me of my lawful pleasure she restrained, and prayed me oft forbearance," sets a keener edge upon it by the inimitable picture of modesty and self-denial.

The character of Cloten, the conceited, booby lord, and rejected lover of Imogen, though not very agreeable in itself, and at present obsolete, is drawn with much humour and quaint extravagance. The description which Imogen gives of his unwelcome addresses to her—"Whose love-suit hath been to me as fearful as a siege"—is enough to cure the most ridiculous lover of his folly. It is remarkable that though Cloten makes so poor a figure in love, he is described as assuming an air of consequence as the Queen's son in a council of state, and with all the absurdity of his person and manners, is not without shrewdness in his observations. So true is it that folly is as often owing to a want of proper sentiments as to a want of understanding! The exclamation of the ancient critic—Oh Menander and Nature, which of you copied from the other! would not be misapplied to Shakespear.

The other characters in this play are represented with great truth and accuracy, and as it happens in most of the author's works, there is not only the utmost keeping in each separate character ; but in the casting of the different parts, and their relation to one another, there is an affinity and harmony, like what we may observe in the gradations of colour in a picture. The striking and powerful contrasts in which Shakespear abounds could not escape observation ; but the use he makes of the principle of analogy to reconcile the greatest diversities of character and to maintain a continuity of feeling throughout, has

not been sufficiently attended to. In CYMBELINE, for instance, the principal interest arises out of the unalterable fidelity of Imogen to her husband under the most trying circumstances. Now the other parts of the picture are filled up with subordinate examples of the same feeling, variously modified by different situations, and applied to the purposes of virtue or vice. The plot is aided by the amorous importunities of Cloten, by the persevering determination of Iachimo to conceal the defeat of his project by a daring imposture: the faithful attachment of Pisanio to his mistress is an affecting accompaniment to the whole; the obstinate adherence to his purpose in Bellarius, who keeps the fate of the young princes so long a secret in resentment for the ungrateful return to his former services, the incorrigible wickedness of the Queen, and even the blind uxorious confidence of Cymbeline, are all so many lines of the same story, tending to the same point. The effect of this coincidence is rather felt than observed; and as the impression exists unconsciously in the mind of the reader, so it probably arose in the same manner in the mind of the author, not from design, but from the force of natural association, a particular train of thought suggesting different inflections of the same predominant feeling, melting into, and strengthening one another, like chords in music.

The characters of Bellarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus, and the romantic scenes in which they appear, are a fine relief to the intrigues and artificial refinements of the court from which they are banished. Nothing can surpass the wildness and simplicity of the descriptions of the mountain life they lead. They follow the business of huntsmen, not of shepherds; and this is in keeping with the spirit of adventure and uncertainty in the rest of the story, and with the scenes in which they are afterwards called on to act. How admirably the youthful fire and impatience to emerge from their obscurity in the young princes is opposed to the cooler calculations and prudent resignation of their more experienced counsellor! How well the disadvantages of knowledge and

of ignorance, of solitude and society, are placed against each other!

> "*Guiderius.* Out of your proof you speak: we poor unfledg'd
> Have never wing'd from view o' th' nest; nor know not
> What air's from home. Haply this life is best,
> If quiet life is best; sweeter to you
> That have a sharper known; well corresponding
> With your stiff age: but unto us it is
> A cell of ignorance; travelling a-bed,
> A prison for a debtor, that not dares
> To stride a limit.
> *Arviragus.* What should we speak of
> When we are old as you? When we shall hear
> The rain and wind beat dark December! How,
> In this our pinching cave, shall we discourse
> The freezing hours away? We have seen nothing.
> We are beastly: subtle as the fox for prey,
> Like warlike as the wolf for what we eat:
> Our valour is to chase what flies; our cage
> We make a quire, as doth the prison'd bird,
> And sing our bondage freely."

The answer of Bellarius to this expostulation is hardly satisfactory; for nothing can be an answer to hope, or the passion of the mind for unknown good, but experience.—The forest of Arden in *As you like it* can alone compare with the mountain scenes in CYMBELINE: yet how different the contemplative quiet of the one from the enterprising boldness and precarious mode of subsistence in the other! Shakespear not only lets us into the minds of his characters, but gives a tone and colour to the scenes he describes from the feelings of their supposed inhabitants. He at the same time preserves the utmost propriety of action and passion, and gives all their local accompaniments. If he was equal to the greatest things, he was not above an attention to the smallest. Thus the gallant sportsmen in CYMBELINE have to encounter the abrupt declivities of hill and valley: Touchstone and Audrey jog along a level path. The deer in CYMBELINE are only regarded as objects of prey, "The game's a-foot," &c.—with Jaques they are fine subjects to moralize upon at leisure, "under the shade of melancholy boughs."

We cannot take leave of this play, which is a favourite

with us, without noticing some occasional touches of natural piety and morality. We may allude here to the opening of the scene in which Bellarius instructs the young princes to pay their orisons to heaven :

> ———— "See, boys ! this gate
> Instructs you how t' adore the Heav'ns ; and bows you
> To morning's holy office.
> *Guiderius.* Hail, Heav'n !
> *Arviragus.* Hail, Heav'n !
> *Bellarius.* Now for our mountain-sport, up to yon hill."

What a grace and unaffected spirit of piety breathes in this passage ! In like manner, one of the brothers says to the other, when about to perform the funeral rites to Fidele,

> "Nay, Cadwall, we must lay his head to the east ;
> My Father hath a reason for't"—

—as if some allusion to the doctrines of the Christian faith had been casually dropped in conversation by the old man, and had been no farther inquired into.

Shakespear's morality is introduced in the same simple, unobtrusive manner. Imogen will not let her companions stay away from the chase to attend her when sick, and gives her reason for it—

> "Stick to your journal course ; *the breach of custom*
> *Is breach of all!*"

When the Queen attempts to disguise her motives for procuring the poison from Cornelius, by saying she means to try its effects on "creatures not worth the hanging," his answer conveys at once a tacit reproof of her hypocrisy, and a useful lesson of humanity—

> ———— "Your Highness
> Shall from this practice but make hard your heart."

MACBETH

> "The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name."

MACBETH and *Lear*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*, are usually reckoned Shakespear's four principal tragedies. *Lear* stands first for the profound intensity of the passion; *Macbeth* for the wildness of the imagination and the rapidity of the action; *Othello* for the progressive interest and powerful alternations of feeling; *Hamlet* for the refined developement of thought and sentiment. If the force of genius shewn in each of these works is astonishing, their variety is not less so. They are like different creations of the same mind, not one of which has the slightest reference to the rest. This distinctness and originality is indeed the necessary consequence of truth and nature. Shakespear's genius alone appeared to possess the resources of nature. He is "your only *tragedy-maker*." His plays have the force of things upon the mind. What he represents is brought home to the bosom as a part of our experience, implanted in the memory as if we had known the places, persons, and things of which he treats. MACBETH is like a record of a preternatural and tragical event. It has the rugged severity of an old chronicle with all that the imagination of the poet can engraft upon traditional belief. The castle of Macbeth, round which "the air smells wooingly," and where "the temple-haunting martlet builds," has a real subsistence in the mind; the Weird Sisters meet us in person on "the blasted heath;" the "air-drawn dagger" moves slowly before our eyes; the "gracious Duncan," the "blood-boultered Banquo" stand before us; all that passed through the mind of Macbeth passes, without the loss of a tittle,

through our's. All that could actually take place, and all that is only possible to be conceived, what was said and what was done, the workings of passion, the spells of magic, are brought before us with the same absolute truth and vividness.—Shakespear excelled in the openings of his plays: that of MACBETH is the most striking of any. The wildness of the scenery, the sudden shifting of the situations and characters, the bustle, the expectations excited, are equally extraordinary. From the first entrance of the Witches and the description of them when they meet Macbeth,

> ———"What are these
> So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like the inhabitants of th' earth
> And yet are on't?"

the mind is prepared for all that follows.

This tragedy is alike distinguished for the lofty imagination it displays, and for the tumultuous vehemence of the action; and the one is made the moving principle of the other. The overwhelming pressure of preternatural agency urges on the tide of human passion with redoubled force. Macbeth himself appears driven along by the violence of his fate like a vessel drifting before a storm: he reels to and fro like a drunken man; he staggers under the weight of his own purposes and the suggestions of others; he stands at bay with his situation; and from the superstitious awe and breathless suspense into which the communications of the Weird Sisters throw him, is hurried on with daring impatience to verify their predictions, and with impious and bloody hand to tear aside the veil which hides the uncertainty of the future. He is not equal to the struggle with fate and conscience. He now "bends up each corporal instrument to the terrible feat;" at other times his heart misgives him, and he is cowed and abashed by his success. "The deed, no less than the attempt, confounds him." His mind is assailed by the stings of remorse, and full of "preternatural solicitings." His speeches and soliloquies are dark riddles on human life, baffling solution, and entangling him in their labyrinths. In thought he is absent

and perplexed, sudden and desperate in act, from a distrust of his own resolution. His energy springs from the anxiety and agitation of his mind. His blindly rushing forward on the objects of his ambition and revenge, or his recoiling from them, equally betrays the harassed state of his feelings.—This part of his character is admirably set off by being brought in connection with that of Lady Macbeth, whose obdurate strength of will and masculine firmness give her the ascendancy over her husband's faultering virtue. She at once seizes on the opportunity that offers for the accomplishment of all their wished-for greatness, and never flinches from her object till all is over. The magnitude of her resolution almost covers the magnitude of her guilt. She is a great bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate. She does not excite our loathing and abhorrence like Regan and Gonerill. She is only wicked to gain a great end; and is perhaps more distinguished by her commanding presence of mind and inexorable self-will, which do not suffer her to be diverted from a bad purpose, when once formed, by weak and womanly regrets, than by the hardness of her heart or want of natural affections. The impression which her lofty determination of character makes on the mind of Macbeth is well described where he exclaims,

> ———"Bring forth men children only;
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males!"

Nor do the pains she is at to "screw his courage to the sticking-place," the reproach to him, not to be "lost so poorly in himself," the assurance that "a little water clears them of this deed," shew any thing but her greater consistency in depravity. Her strong-nerved ambition furnishes ribs of steel to "the sides of his intent;" and she is herself wound up to the execution of her baneful project with the same unshrinking fortitude in crime, that in other circumstances she would probably have shewn patience in suffering. The deliberate sacrifice of all other considerations to the gaining "for their future days and nights sole sovereign sway and masterdom," by the murder

of Duncan, is gorgeously expressed in her invocation on hearing of "his fatal entrance under her battlements:"—

> ————"Come all you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here:
> And fill me, from the crown to th' toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murthering ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night!
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heav'n peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry, hold, hold!—

When she first hears that "Duncan comes there to sleep" she is so overcome by the news, which is beyond her utmost expectations, that she answers the messenger, "Thou'rt mad to say it:" and on receiving her husband's account of the predictions of the Witches, conscious of his instability of purpose, and that her presence is necessary to goad him on to the consummation of his promised greatness she exclaims—

> ————"Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round,
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crowned withal."

This swelling exultation and keen spirit of triumph, this uncontroulable eagerness of anticipation, which seems to dilate her form and take possession of all her faculties, this solid, substantial flesh and blood display of passion, exhibit a striking contrast to the cold, abstracted, gratuitous, servile malignity of the Witches, who are equally instrumental in urging Macbeth to his fate for the mere love of mischief, and from a disinterested delight in deformity and cruelty. They are hags of mischief, obscene panders to iniquity, malicious from their impo-

tence of enjoyment, enamoured of destruction, because they are themselves unreal, abortive, half-existences—who become sublime from their exemption from all human sympathies and contempt for all human affairs, as Lady Macbeth does by the force of passion! Her fault seems to have been an excess of that strong principle of self-interest and family aggrandisement, not amenable to the common feelings of compassion and justice, which is so marked a feature in barbarous nations and times. A passing reflection of this kind, on the resemblance of the sleeping king to her father, alone prevents her from slaying Duncan with her own hand.

In speaking of the character of Lady Macbeth, we ought not to pass over Mrs. Siddons's manner of acting that part. We can conceive of nothing grander. It was something above nature. It seemed almost as if a being of a superior order had dropped from a higher sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine; she was tragedy personified. In coming on in the sleeping-scene, her eyes were open, but their sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did. Her lips moved involuntarily—all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. She glided on and off the stage like an apparition. To have seen her in that character was an event in every one's life, not to be forgotten.

The dramatic beauty of the character of Duncan, which excites the respect and pity even of his murderers, has been often pointed out. It forms a picture of itself. An instance of the author's power of giving a striking effect to a common reflection, by the manner of introducing it, occurs in a speech of Duncan, complaining of his having been deceived in his opinion of the Thane of Cawdor, at the very moment that he is expressing the most unbounded confidence in the loyalty and services of Macbeth.

> "There is no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face:
> He was a gentleman, on whom I built

An absolute trust.
O worthiest cousin, *(addressing himself to Macbeth)*
The sin of my ingratitude e'en now
Was great upon me," &c.

Another passage to shew that Shakespear lost sight of nothing that could in any way give relief or heightening to his subject, is the conversation which takes place between Banquo and Fleance immediately before the murder-scene of Duncan.

"*Banquo.* How goes the night, boy?
Fleance. The moon is down: I have not heard the clock.
Banquo. And she goes down at twelve.
Fleance. I take't, 'tis later, Sir.
Banquo. Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heav'n,
Their candles are all out.—
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep: Merciful Powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose."

In like manner, a fine idea is given of the gloomy coming on of evening, just as Banquo is going to be assassinated.

"Light thickens and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood."

* * * * * *

"Now spurs the lated traveller apace
To gain the timely inn."

MACBETH (generally speaking) is done upon a stronger and more systematic principle of contrast than any other of Shakespear's plays. It moves upon the verge of an abyss, and is a constant struggle between life and death. The action is desperate and the reaction is dreadful. It is a huddling together of fierce extremes, a war of opposite natures which of them shall destroy the other. There is nothing but what has a violent end or violent beginnings. The lights and shades are laid on with a determined hand; the transitions from triumph to despair, from the height of terror to the repose of death, are sudden and startling; every passion brings in its fellow-contrary, and the thoughts pitch and jostle against each other as in the dark. The whole play is an unruly chaos of strange and forbidden things, where the ground rocks under our feet. Shakespear's genius here took its full swing, and trod

upon the farthest bounds of nature and passion. This circumstance will account for the abruptness and violent antitheses of the style, the throes and labour which run through the expression, and from defects will turn them into beauties. "So fair and foul a day I have not seen," &c. "Such welcome and unwelcome news together." "Men's lives are like the flowers in their caps, dying or ere they sicken." "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it." The scene before the castle-gate follows the appearance of the Witches on the heath, and is followed by a midnight murder. Duncan is cut off betimes by treason leagued with witchcraft, and Macduff is ripped untimely from his mother's womb to avenge his death. Macbeth, after the death of Banquo, wishes for his presence in extravagant terms, "To him and all we thirst," and when his ghost appears, cries out, "Avaunt and quit my sight," and being gone, he is "himself again." Macbeth resolves to get rid of Macduff, that "he may sleep in spite of thunder;" and cheers his wife on the doubtful intelligence of Banquo's taking-off with the encouragement—"Then be thou jocund: ere the bat has flown his cloistered flight; ere to black Hecate's summons the shard-born beetle has rung night's yawning peel, there shall be done—a deed of dreadful note." In Lady Macbeth's speech "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done 't," there is murder and filial piety together; and in urging him to fulfil his vengeance against the defenceless king, her thoughts spare the blood neither of infants nor old age. The description of the Witches is full of the same contradictory principle; they "rejoice when good kings bleed," they are neither of the earth nor the air, but both; "they should be women, but their beards forbid it;" they take all the pains possible to lead Macbeth on to the height of his ambition, only to betray him "in deeper consequence," and after shewing him all the pomp of their art, discover their malignant delight in his disappointed hopes, by that bitter taunt, "Why stands Macbeth thus amazedly?" We might multiply such instances every where.

The leading features in the character of Macbeth are striking enough, and they form what may be thought at first only a bold, rude, Gothic outline. By comparing it with other characters of the same author we shall perceive the absolute truth and identity which is observed in the midst of the giddy whirl and rapid career of events. Macbeth in Shakespear no more loses his identity of character in the fluctuations of fortune or the storm of passion, than Macbeth in himself would have lost the identity of his person. Thus he is as distinct a being from Richard III. as it is possible to imagine, though these two characters in common hands, and indeed in the hands of any other poet, would have been a repetition of the same general idea, more or less exaggerated. For both are tyrants, usurpers, murderers, both aspiring and ambitious, both courageous, cruel, treacherous. But Richard is cruel from nature and constitution. Macbeth becomes so from accidental circumstances. Richard is from his birth deformed in body and mind, and naturally incapable of good. Macbeth is full of "the milk of human kindness," is frank, sociable, generous. He is tempted to the commission of guilt by golden opportunities, by the instigations of his wife, and by prophetic warnings. Fate and metaphysical aid conspire against his virtue and his loyalty. Richard on the contrary needs no prompter, but wades through a series of crimes to the height of his ambition from the ungovernable violence of his temper and a reckless love of mischief. He is never gay but in the prospect or in the success of his villainies: Macbeth is full of horror at the thoughts of the murder of Duncan, which he is with difficulty prevailed on to commit, and of remorse after its perpetration. Richard has no mixture of common humanity in his composition, no regard to kindred or posterity, he owns no fellowship with others, he is "himself alone." Macbeth is not destitute of feelings of sympathy, is accessible to pity, is even made in some measure the dupe of his uxoriousness, ranks the loss of friends, of the cordial love of his followers, and of his good name, among the causes which have made him

weary of life, and regrets that he has ever seized the crown by unjust means, since he cannot transmit it to his posterity—

> "For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind—
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murther'd,
> To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings."

In the agitation of his mind, he envies those whom he has sent to peace. "Duncan is in his grave; after life's fitful fever he sleeps well."—It is true, he becomes more callous as he plunges deeper in guilt, "direness is thus rendered familiar to his slaughterous thoughts," and he in the end anticipates his wife in the boldness and bloodiness of his enterprises, while she for want of the same stimulus of action, "is troubled with thick-coming fancies that rob her of her rest," goes mad and dies. Macbeth endeavours to escape from reflection on his crimes by repelling their consequences, and banishes remorse for the past by the meditation of future mischief. This is not the principle of Richard's cruelty, which displays the wanton malice of a fiend as much as the frailty of human passion. Macbeth is goaded on to acts of violence and retaliation by necessity; to Richard, blood is a pastime.—There are other decisive differences inherent in the two characters. Richard may be regarded as a man of the world, a plotting, hardened knave, wholly regardless of every thing but his own ends, and the means to secure them.—Not so Macbeth. The superstitions of the age, the rude state of society, the local scenery and customs, all give a wildness and imaginary grandeur to his character. From the strangeness of the events that surround him, he is full of amazement and fear; and stands in doubt between the world of reality and the world of fancy. He sees sights not shewn to mortal eye, and hears unearthly music. All is tumult and disorder within and without his mind; his purposes recoil upon himself, are broken and disjointed; he is the double thrall of his passions and his evil destiny. Richard is not a character either of imagination or pathos, but of pure self-will. There is no conflict of opposite feelings in his breast. The apparitions which he sees only haunt him

in his sleep; nor does he live like Macbeth in a waking dream. Macbeth has considerable energy and manliness of character; but then he is "subject to all the skyey influences." He is sure of nothing but the present moment. Richard in the busy turbulence of his projects never loses his self-possession, and makes use of every circumstance that happens as an instrument of his long-reaching designs. In his last extremity we can only regard him as a wild beast taken in the toils: while we never entirely lose our concern for Macbeth; and he calls back all our sympathy by that fine close of thoughtful melancholy,

> "My way of life is fallen into the sear,
> The yellow leaf; and that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, troops of friends, I must not look to have;
> But in their stead, curses not loud but deep,
> Mouth-honour, breath, which the poor heart
> Would fain deny, and dare not."

We can conceive a common actor to play Richard tolerably well; we can conceive no one to play Macbeth properly, or to look like a man that had encountered the Weird Sisters. All the actors that we have ever seen, appear as if they had encountered them on the boards of Covent-garden or Drury-lane, but not on the heath at Foris, and as if they did not believe what they had seen. The Witches of Macbeth indeed are ridiculous on the modern stage, and we doubt if the Furies of Æschylus would be more respected. The progress of manners and knowledge has an influence on the stage, and will in time perhaps destroy both tragedy and comedy. Filch's picking pockets in the *Beggar's Opera* is not so good a jest as it used to be: by the force of the police and of philosophy, Lillo's murders and the ghosts in Shakespear will become obsolete. At last, there will be nothing left, good nor bad, to be desired or dreaded, on the theatre or in real life.—A question has been started with respect to the originality of Shakespear's witches, which has been well answered by Mr. Lamb in his notes to the "Specimens of Early Dramatic Poetry."

"Though some resemblance may be traced between the

charms in MACBETH, and the incantations in this play, (the Witch of Middleton) which is supposed to have preceded it, this coincidence will not detract much from the originality of Shakespear. His Witches are distinguished from the Witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first met with Macbeth's, he is spellbound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These Witches can hurt the body ; those have power over the soul.—Hecate in Middleton has a son, a low buffoon : the hags of Shakespear have neither child of their own, nor seem to be descended from any parent. They are foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them.—Except Hecate, they have no names, which heightens their mysteriousness. The names, and some of the properties which Middleton has given to his hags, excite smiles. The Weird Sisters are serious things. Their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But, in a lesser degree, the Witches of Middleton are fine creations. Their power too is, in some measure, over the mind. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, *like a thick scurf o'er life.*"

JULIUS CÆSAR

JULIUS CÆSAR was one of three principal plays by different authors, pitched upon by the celebrated Earl of Hallifax to be brought out in a splendid manner by subscription, in the year 1707. The other two were the *King and No King* of Fletcher, and Dryden's *Maiden Queen.* There perhaps

might be political reasons for this selection, as far as regards our author. Otherwise, Shakespear's JULIUS CÆSAR is not equal as a whole, to either of his other plays taken from the Roman history. It is inferior in interest to *Coriolanus*, and both in interest and power to *Antony and Cleopatra*. It however abounds in admirable and affecting passages, and is remarkable for the profound knowledge of character, in which Shakespear could scarcely fail. If there is any exception to this remark, it is in the hero of the piece himself. We do not much admire the representation here given of Julius Cæsar, nor do we think it answers to the portrait given of him in his Commentaries. He makes several vapouring and rather pedantic speeches, and does nothing. Indeed, he has nothing to do. So far, the fault of the character is the fault of the plot.

The spirit with which the poet has entered at once into the manners of the common people, and the jealousies and heart-burnings of the different factions, is shewn in the first scene, where Flavius and Marullus, tribunes of the people, and some citizens of Rome, appear upon the stage.

"*Flavius*. Thou art a cobler, art thou?

Cobler. Truly, Sir, *all* that I live by, is the *awl*: I meddle with no tradesman's matters, nor woman's matters, but *with-al*, I am indeed, Sir, a surgeon to old shoes; when they are in great danger, I recover them.

Flavius. But wherefore art not in thy shop to-day?
Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?

Cobler. Truly, Sir, to wear out their shoes, to get myself into more work. But indeed, Sir, we make holiday to see Cæsar, and rejoice in his triumph."

To this specimen of quaint low humour immediately follows that unexpected and animated burst of indignant eloquence, put into the mouth of one of the angry tribunes.

"*Marullus*. Wherefore rejoice!—What conquest brings he home?
What tributaries follow him to Rome,
To grace in captive-bonds his chariot-wheels?
Oh you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome!
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft

Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The live-long day with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome:
And when you saw his chariot but appear,
Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tyber trembled underneath his banks
To hear the replication of your sounds,
Made in his concave shores?
And do you now put on your best attire?
And do you now cull out an holiday?
And do you now strew flowers in his way
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
Begone——
Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the Gods to intermit the plague,
That needs must light on this ingratitude."

The well-known dialogue between Brutus and Cassius, in which the latter breaks the design of the conspiracy to the former, and partly gains him over to it, is a noble piece of high-minded declamation. Cassius's insisting on the pretended effeminacy of Cæsar's character, and his description of their swimming across the Tiber together, "once upon a raw and gusty day," are among the finest strokes in it. But perhaps the whole is not equal to the short scene which follows, when Cæsar enters with his train:—

"*Brutus.* The games are done, and Cæsar is returning.
Cassius. As they pass by, pluck Casca by the sleeve,
And he will, after his sour fashion, tell you
What has proceeded worthy note to-day.
Brutus. I will do so; but look you, Cassius—
The angry spot doth glow on Cæsar's brow,
And all the rest look like a chidden train.
Calphurnia's cheek is pale; and Cicero
Looks with such ferret and such fiery eyes,
As we have seen him in the Capitol,
Being crost in conference by some senators.
Cassius. Casca will tell us what the matter is.
Cæsar. Antonius——
Antony. Cæsar?
Cæsar. Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights:
Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look,
He thinks too much; such men are dangerous.

Antony. Fear him not, Cæsar, he's not dangerous:
He is a noble Roman, and well given.
Cæsar. Would he were fatter; but I fear him not:
Yet if my name were liable to fear,
I do not know the man I should avoid
So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much;
He is a great observer; and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
As thou dost, Antony; he hears no music:
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort,
As if he mock'd himself, and scorn'd his spirit,
That could be mov'd to smile at any thing.
Such men as he be never at heart's ease,
Whilst they behold a greater than themselves;
And therefore are they very dangerous.
I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd
Than what I fear; for always I am Cæsar.
Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf,
And tell me truly what thou think'st of him."

We know hardly any passage more expressive of the genius of Shakespear than this. It is as if he had been actually present, had known the different characters and what they thought of one another, and had taken down what he heard and saw, their looks, words, and gestures, just as they happened.

The character of Mark Antony is farther speculated upon where the conspirators deliberate whether he shall fall with Cæsar. Brutus is against it—

"And for Mark Antony, think not of him:
For he can do no more than Cæsar's arm,
When Cæsar's head is off.
Cassius. Yet I do fear him:
For in th' ingrafted love he bears to Cæsar—
Brutus. Alas, good Cassius, do not think of him:
If he love Cæsar, all that he can do
Is to himself, take thought, and die for Cæsar:
And that were much, he should; for he is giv'n
To sports, to wildness, and much company.
Trebonius. There is no fear in him; let him not die:
For he will live, and laugh at this hereafter."

They were in the wrong; and Cassius was right.

The honest manliness of Brutus is however sufficient to find out the unfitness of Cicero to be included in their enterprize, from his affected egotism and literary vanity.

> "O, name him not: let us not break with him;
> For he will never follow any thing,
> That other men begin."

His scepticism as to prodigies and his moralising on the weather—"This disturbed sky is not to walk in" are in the same spirit of refined imbecility.

Shakespear has in this play and elsewhere shewn the same penetration into political character and the springs of public events as into those of every-day life. For instance, the whole design of the conspirators to liberate their country fails from the generous temper and over-weening confidence of Brutus in the goodness of their cause and the assistance of others. Thus it has always been. Those who mean well themselves think well of others, and fall a prey to their security. That humanity and honesty which dispose men to resist injustice and tyranny render them unfit to cope with the cunning and power of those who are opposed to them. The friends of liberty trust to the professions of others, because they are themselves sincere, and endeavour to reconcile the public good with the least possible hurt to its enemies, who have no regard to any thing but their own unprincipled ends, and stick at nothing to accomplish them. Cassius was better cut out for a conspirator. His heart prompted his head. His watchful jealousy made him fear the worst that might happen, and his irritability of temper added to his inveteracy of purpose, and sharpened his patriotism. The mixed nature of his motives made him fitter to contend with bad men. The vices are never so well employed as in combating one another. Tyranny and servility are to be dealt with after their own fashion: otherwise, they will triumph over those who spare them, and finally pronounce their funeral panegyric, as Antony did that of Brutus.

> "All the conspirators, save only he,
> Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar:
> He only in a general honest thought
> And common good to all, made one of them."

The quarrel between Brutus and Cassius is managed in a masterly way. The dramatic fluctuation of passion, the

calmness of Brutus, the heat of Cassius, are admirably described; and the exclamation of Cassius on hearing of the death of Portia, which he does not learn till after their reconciliation, "How 'scaped I killing when I crost you so?" gives double force to all that has gone before. The scene between Brutus and Portia, where she endeavours to extort the secret of the conspiracy from him, is conceived in the most heroical spirit, and the burst of tenderness in Brutus—

> "You are my true and honourable wife;
> As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
> That visit my sad heart"—

is justified by her whole behaviour. Portia's breathless impatience to learn the event of the conspiracy, in the dialogue with Lucius, is full of passion. The interest which Portia takes in Brutus and that which Calphurnia takes in the fate of Cæsar are discriminated with the nicest precision. Mark Antony's speech over the dead body of Cæsar has been justly admired for the mixture of pathos and artifice in it: that of Brutus certainly is not so good.

The entrance of the conspirators to the house of Brutus at midnight is rendered very impressive. In the midst of this scene, we meet with one of those careless and natural digressions which occur so frequently and beautifully in Shakespear. After Cassius has introduced his friends one by one, Brutus says—

> "They are all welcome.
> What watchful cares do interpose themselves
> Betwixt your eyes and night?
> *Cassius.* Shall I entreat a word? *(They whisper.)*
> *Decius.* Here lies the east: doth not the day break here?
> *Casca.* No.
> *Cinna.* O pardon, Sir, it doth; and yon grey lines,
> That fret the clouds, are messengers of day.
> *Casca.* You shall confess, that you are both deceiv'd:
> Here, as I point my sword, the sun arises,
> Which is a great way growing on the south,
> Weighing the youthful season of the year.
> Some two months hence, up higher toward the north
> He first presents his fire, and the high east
> Stands as the Capitol, directly here."

We cannot help thinking this graceful familiarity better than all the fustian in the world.—The truth of history in JULIUS CÆSAR is very ably worked up with dramatic effect. The councils of generals, the doubtful turns of battles, are represented to the life. The death of Brutus is worthy of him—it has the dignity of the Roman senator with the firmness of the Stoic philosopher. But what is perhaps better than either, is the little incident of his boy, Lucius, falling asleep over his instrument, as he is playing to his master in his tent, the night before the battle. Nature had played him the same forgetful trick once before on the night of the conspiracy. The humanity of Brutus is the same on both occasions.

> ———"It is no matter:
> Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber.
> Thou hast no figures nor no fantasies,
> Which busy care draws in the brains of men.
> Therefore thou sleep'st so sound."

OTHELLO

IT has been said that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. That is, it substitutes imaginary sympathy for mere selfishness. It gives us a high and permanent interest, beyond ourselves, in humanity as such. It raises the great, the remote, and the possible to an equality with the real, the little and the near. It makes man a partaker with his kind. It subdues and softens the stubbornness of his will. It teaches him that there are and have been others like himself, by shewing him as in a glass what they have felt, thought, and done. It opens the chambers of the human heart. It leaves nothing indifferent to us that can affect our common nature. It excites our sensibility by exhibiting the passions wound up to the utmost pitch by the power of imagination or the temptation of circumstances; and corrects their fatal excesses in ourselves by pointing to the greater

extent of sufferings and of crimes to which they have led others. Tragedy creates a balance of the affections. It makes us thoughtful spectators in the lists of life. It is the refiner of the species ; a discipline of humanity. The habitual study of poetry and works of imagination is one chief part of a well-grounded education. A taste for liberal art is necessary to complete the character of a gentleman. Science alone is hard and mechanical. It exercises the understanding upon things out of ourselves, while it leaves the affections unemployed, or engrossed with our own immediate, narrow interests.—OTHELLO furnishes an illustration of these remarks. It excites our sympathy in an extraordinary degree. The moral it conveys has a closer application to the concerns of human life than that of almost any other of Shakespear's plays. "It comes directly home to the bosoms and business of men." The pathos in *Lear* is indeed more dreadful and overpowering : but it is less natural, and less of every day's occurrence. We have not the same degree of sympathy with the passions described in *Macbeth*. The interest in *Hamlet* is more remote and reflex. That of OTHELLO is at once equally profound and affecting.

The picturesque contrasts of character in this play are almost as remarkable as the depth of the passion. The Moor Othello, the gentle Desdemona, the villain Iago, the good-natured Cassio, the fool Roderigo, present a range and variety of character as striking and palpable as that produced by the opposition of costume in a picture. Their distinguishing qualities stand out to the mind's eye, so that even when we are not thinking of their actions or sentiments, the idea of their persons is still as present to us as ever. These characters and the images they stamp upon the mind are the farthest asunder possible, the distance between them is immense : yet the compass of knowledge and invention which the poet has shewn in embodying these extreme creations of his genius is only greater than the truth and felicity with which he has identified each character with itself, or blended their different qualities together in the same story. What a

contrast the character of Othello forms to that of Iago! At the same time, the force of conception with which these two figures are opposed to each other is rendered still more intense by the complete consistency with which the traits of each character are brought out in a state of the highest finishing. The making one black and the other white, the one unprincipled, the other unfortunate in the extreme, would have answered the common purposes of effect, and satisfied the ambition of an ordinary painter of character. Shakespear has laboured the finer shades of difference in both with as much care and skill as if he had had to depend on the execution alone for the success of his design. On the other hand, Desdemona and Æmilia are not meant to be opposed with any thing like strong contrast to each other. Both are, to outward appearance, characters of common life, not more distinguished than women usually are, by difference of rank and situation. The difference of their thoughts and sentiments is however laid open, their minds are separated from each other by signs as plain and as little to be mistaken as the complexions of their husbands.

The movement of the passion in Othello is exceedingly different from that of Macbeth. In Macbeth there is a violent struggle between opposite feelings, between ambition and the stings of conscience, almost from first to last: in Othello, the doubtful conflict between contrary passions, though dreadful, continues only for a short time, and the chief interest is excited by the alternate ascendancy of different passions, by the entire and unforeseen change from the fondest love and most unbounded confidence to the tortures of jealousy and the madness of hatred. The revenge of Othello, after it has once taken thorough possession of his mind, never quits it, but grows stronger and stronger at every moment of its delay. The nature of the Moor is noble, confiding, tender, and generous; but his blood is of the most inflammable kind; and being once roused by a sense of his wrongs, he is stopped by no considerations of remorse or

pity till he has given a loose to all the dictates of his rage and his despair. It is in working his noble nature up to this extremity through rapid but gradual transitions, in raising passion to its height from the smallest beginnings and in spite of all obstacles, in painting the expiring conflict between love and hatred, tenderness and resentment, jealousy and remorse, in unfolding the strength and the weakness of our nature, in uniting sublimity of thought with the anguish of the keenest woe, in putting in motion the various impulses that agitate this our mortal being, and at last blending them in that noble tide of deep and sustained passion, impetuous but majestic, that "flows on to the Propontic, and knows no ebb," that Shakespear has shewn the mastery of his genius and of his power over the human heart. The third act of Othello is his finest display, not of knowledge or passion separately, but of the two combined, of the knowledge of character with the expression of passion, of consummate art in the keeping up of appearances with the profound workings of nature, and the convulsive movements of uncontroulable agony, of the power of inflicting torture and of suffering it. Not only is the tumult of passion in Othello's mind heaved up from the very bottom of the soul, but every the slightest undulation of feeling is seen on the surface, as it arises from the impulses of imagination or the malicious suggestions of Iago. The progressive preparation for the catastrophe is wonderfully managed from the Moor's first gallant recital of the story of his love, of "the spells and witchcraft he had used," from his unlooked-for and romantic success, the fond satisfaction with which he dotes on his own happiness, the unreserved tenderness of Desdemona and her innocent importunities in favour of Cassio, irritating the suspicions instilled into her husband's mind by the perfidy of Iago, and rankling there to poison, till he loses all command of himself, and his rage can only be appeased by blood. She is introduced, just before Iago begins to put his scheme in practice, pleading for Cassio with all the thoughtless gaiety of friendship and winning confidence in the love of Othello.

> "What! Michael Cassio?
> That came a wooing with you, and so many a time,
> When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
> Hath ta'en your part, to have so much to do
> To bring him in?—Why this is not a boon:
> 'Tis as I should intreat you wear your gloves,
> Or feed on nourishing meats, or keep you warm;
> Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
> To your person. Nay, when I have a suit,
> Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
> It shall be full of poise, and fearful to be granted."

Othello's confidence, at first only staggered by broken hints and insinuations, recovers itself at sight of Desdemona; and he exclaims

> "If she be false, O then Heav'n mocks itself:
> I'll not believe it."

But presently after, on brooding over his suspicions by himself, and yielding to his apprehensions of the worst, his smothered jealousy breaks out into open fury, and he returns to demand satisfaction of Iago like a wild beast stung with the envenomed shaft of the hunters. "Look where he comes," &c. In this state of exasperation and violence, after the first paroxysms of his grief and tenderness have had their vent in that passionate apostrophe, "I felt not Cassio's kisses on her lips," Iago, by false aspersions, and by presenting the most revolting images to his mind,[1] easily turns the storm of passion from himself against Desdemona, and works him up into a trembling agony of doubt and fear, in which he abandons all his love and hopes in a breath.

> "Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago,
> All my fond love thus do I blow to Heav'n. 'Tis gone.
> Arise black vengeance from the hollow hell;
> Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
> To tyrannous hate! Swell bosom with thy fraught;
> For 'tis of aspicks' tongues."

From this time, his raging thoughts "never look back, ne'er ebb to humble love," till his revenge is sure of its object, the painful regrets and involuntary recollections of past circumstances which cross his mind amidst the dim

[1] See the passage, beginning—"It is impossible you should see this, were they as prime as goats," &c.

trances of passion, aggravating the sense of his wrongs, but not shaking his purpose. Once indeed, where Iago shews him Cassio with the handkerchief in his hand, and making sport (as he thinks) of his misfortunes, the intolerable bitterness of his feelings, the extreme sense of shame, makes him fall to praising her accomplishments and relapse into a momentary fit of weakness, "Yet, Oh the pity of it, Iago, the pity of it!" This returning fondness however only serves, as it is managed by Iago, to whet his revenge, and set his heart more against her. In his conversations with Desdemona, the persuasion of her guilt and the immediate proofs of her duplicity seem to irritate his resentment and aversion to her; but in the scene immediately preceding her death, the recollection of his love returns upon him in all its tenderness and force; and after her death, he all at once forgets his wrongs in the sudden and irreparable sense of his loss.

> "My wife! My wife! What wife? I have no wife.
> Oh insupportable! Oh heavy hour!"

This happens before he is assured of her innocence; but afterwards his remorse is as dreadful as his revenge has been, and yields only to fixed and death-like despair. His farewell speech, before he kills himself, in which he conveys his reasons to the senate for the murder of his wife, is equal to the first speech in which he gave them an account of his courtship of her, and "his whole course of love." Such an ending was alone worthy of such a commencement.

If any thing could add to the force of our sympathy with Othello, or compassion for his fate, it would be the frankness and generosity of his nature, which so little deserve it. When Iago first begins to practise upon his unsuspecting friendship, he answers—

> ———"'Tis not to make me jealous,
> To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
> Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well;
> Where virtue is, these are most virtuous.
> Nor from my own weak merits will I draw
> The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
> For she had eyes and chose me."

This character is beautifully (and with affecting simplicity) confirmed by what Desdemona herself says of him to Æmilia after she has lost the handkerchief, the first pledge of his love to her.

> "Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse
> Full of cruzadoes. And but my noble Moor
> Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness,
> As jealous creatures are, it were enough
> To put him to ill thinking.
> *Æmilia.* Is he not jealous?
> *Desdemona.* Who he? I think the sun where he was born
> Drew all such humours from him."

In a short speech of Æmilia's, there occurs one of those side-intimations of the fluctuations of passion which we seldom meet with but in Shakespear. After Othello has resolved upon the death of his wife, and bids her dismiss her attendant for the night, she answers,

> "I will, my Lord.
> *Æmilia.* How goes it now? *He looks gentler than he did.*"

Shakespear has here put into half a line what some authors would have spun out into ten set speeches.

The character of Desdemona is inimitable both in itself, and as it appears in contrast with Othello's groundless jealousy, and with the foul conspiracy of which she is the innocent victim. Her beauty and external graces are only indirectly glanced at: we see "her visage in her mind;" her character everwhere predominates over her person.

> "A maiden never bold:
> Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
> Blush'd at itself."

There is one fine compliment paid to her by Cassio, who exclaims triumphantly when she comes ashore at Cyprus after the storm,

> "Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
> As having sense of beauty, do omit
> Their mortal natures, letting safe go by
> The divine Desdemona."

In general, as is the case with most of Shakespear's females, we lose sight of her personal charms in her attachment and devotedness to her husband. "She is subdued even to the very quality of her lord;" and to

Othello's "honours and his valiant parts her soul and fortunes consecrates." The lady protests so much herself, and she is as good as her word. The truth of conception, with which timidity and boldness are united in the same character, is marvellous. The extravagance of her resolutions, the pertinacity of her affections, may be said to arise out of the gentleness of her nature. They imply an unreserved reliance on the purity of her own intentions, an entire surrender of her fears to her love, a knitting of herself (heart and soul) to the fate of another. Bating the commencement of her passion, which is a little fantastical and headstrong (though even that may perhaps be consistently accounted for from her inability to resist a rising inclination[1]) her whole character consists in having no will of her own, no prompter but her obedience. Her romantic turn is only a consequence of the domestic and practical part of her disposition; and instead of following Othello to the wars, she would gladly have "remained at home a moth of peace," if her husband could have staid with her. Her resignation and angelic sweetness of temper do not desert her at the last. The scenes in which she laments and tries to account for Othello's estrangement from her are exquisitely beautiful After he has struck her, and called her names, she says,

> ——"Alas, Iago,
> What shall I do to win my lord again?
> Good friend, go to him; for by this light of heaven,
> I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel;
> If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,
> Either in discourse, or thought, or actual deed
> Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense
> Delighted them on any other form;
> Or that I do not, and ever did,
> And ever will, though he do shake me off
> To beggarly divorcement, love him dearly
> Comfort forswear me. Unkindness may do much,
> And his unkindness may defeat my life,
> But never taint my love.
> *Iago.* I pray you be content: 'tis but his humour.
> The business of the state does him offence.
> *Desdemona.* If 'twere no other!"—

[1] "*Iago.* Ay, too gentle.
Othello. Nay, that's certain."

The scene which follows with Æmilia and the song of the Willow, are equally beautiful, and shew the author's extreme power of varying the expression of passion, in all its moods and in all circumstances.

> "*Æmilia.* Would you had never seen him.
> *Desdemona.* So would not I: my love doth so approve him,
> That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns,
> Have grace and favour in them," &c.

Not the unjust suspicions of Othello, not Iago's unprovoked treachery, place Desdemona in a more amiable or interesting light than the conversation (half earnest, half jest) between her and Æmilia on the common behaviour of women to their husbands. This dialogue takes place just before the last fatal scene. If Othello had overheard it, it would have prevented the whole catastrophe; but then it would have spoiled the play.

The character of Iago is one of the supererogations of Shakespear's genius. Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought this whole character unnatural, because his villainy is *without a sufficient motive*. Shakespear, who was as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, is natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt or kill flies for sport. Iago in fact belongs to a class of character, common to Shakespear and at the same time peculiar to him; whose heads are as acute and active as their hearts are hard and callous. Iago is to be sure an extreme instance of the kind; that is to say, of diseased intellectual activity, with the most perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a decided preference of the latter, because it falls more readily in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts and scope to his actions. He is quite or nearly as indifferent to his own fate as to that of others; he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage; and is himself the dupe and victim of his ruling passion—an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous

kind. "Our ancient" is a philosopher, who fancies that a lie that kills has more point in it than an alliteration or an antithesis; who thinks a fatal experiment on the peace of a family a better thing than watching the palpitations in the heart of a flea in a microscope; who plots the ruin of his friends as an exercise for his ingenuity, and stabs men in the dark to prevent *ennui*. His gaiety, such as it is, arises from the success of his treachery; his ease from the torture he has inflicted on others. He is an amateur of tragedy in real life; and instead of employing his invention on imaginary characters, or long-forgotten incidents, he takes the bolder and more desperate course of getting up his plot at home, casts the principal parts among his nearest friends and connections, and rehearses it in downright earnest, with steady nerves and unabated resolution. We will just give an illustration or two.

One of his most characteristic speeches is that immediately after the marriage of Othello.

> "*Roderigo.* What a full fortune does the thick lips owe,
> If he can carry her thus!
> *Iago.* Call up her father:
> Rouse him *(Othello)*, make after him, poison his delight,
> Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,
> And tho' he in a fertile climate dwell,
> Plague him with flies: tho' that his joy be joy,
> Yet throw such changes of vexation on it,
> As it may lose some colour."

In the next passage, his imagination runs riot in the mischief he is plotting, and breaks out into the wildness and impetuosity of real enthusiasm.

> "*Roderigo.* Here is her father's house: I'll call aloud.
> *Iago.* Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell
> As when, by night and negligence, the fire
> Is spied in populous cities."

One of his most favourite topics, on which he is rich indeed, and in descanting on which his spleen serves him for a Muse, is the disproportionate match between Desdemona and the Moor. This is a clue to the character of the lady which he is by no means ready to part with. It is brought forward in the first scene, and he recurs to it,

when in answer to his insinuations against Desdemona, Roderigo says,

"I cannot believe that in her—she's full of most blest conditions.
Iago. Bless'd fig's end. The wine she drinks is made of grapes. If she had been blest, she would never have married the Moor."

And again with still more spirit and fatal effect afterwards, when he turns this very suggestion arising in Othello's own breast to her prejudice.

"*Othello.* And yet how nature erring from itself—
Iago. Aye, there's the point;—as to be bold with you,
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree," &c.

This is probing to the quick. Iago here turns the character of poor Desdemona, as it were, inside out. It is certain that nothing but the genius of Shakespear could have preserved the entire interest and delicacy of the part, and have even drawn an additional elegance and dignity from the peculiar circumstances in which she is placed.—The habitual licentiousness of Iago's conversation is not to be traced to the pleasure he takes in gross or lascivious images, but to his desire of finding out the worst side of every thing, and of proving himself an overmatch for appearances. He has none of "the milk of human kindness" in his composition. His imagination rejects every thing that has not a strong infusion of the most unpalatable ingredients; his mind digests only poisons. Virtue or goodness or whatever has the least "relish of salvation in it," is, to his depraved appetite, sickly and insipid: and he even resents the good opinion entertained of his own integrity, as if it were an affront cast on the masculine sense and spirit of his character. Thus at the meeting between Othello and Desdemona, he exclaims—"Oh, you are well tuned now: but I'll set down the pegs that make this music, *as honest as I am*"—his character of *bonhommie* not sitting at all easy upon him. In the scenes, where he tries to work Othello to his purpose, he is proportionably guarded, insidious, dark, and deliberate. We believe nothing ever came up to the profound dissimulation and dextrous artifice of the well-

known dialogue in the third act, where he first enters upon the execution of his design.

"*Iago.* My noble lord.
Othello. What dost thou say, Iago?
Iago. Did Michael Cassio,
When you woo'd my lady, know of your love?
Othello. He did from first to last.
Why dost thou ask?
Iago. But for a satisfaction of my thought,
No further harm.
Othello. Why of thy thought, Iago?
Iago. I did not think he had been acquainted with it.
Othello. O yes, and went between us very oft—
Iago. Indeed!
Othello. Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught of that?
Is he not honest?
Iago. Honest, my lord?
Othello. Honest? Ay, honest.
Iago. My lord, for aught I know.
Othello. What do'st thou think?
Iago. Think, my lord!
Othello. Think, my lord! Alas, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shewn."—

The stops and breaks, the deep workings of treachery under the mask of love and honesty, the anxious watchfulness, the cool earnestness, and if we may so say, the *passion* of hypocrisy, marked in every line, receive their last finishing in that inconceivable burst of pretended indignation at Othello's doubts of his sincerity.

"O grace! O Heaven forgive me!
Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?
God be wi' you; take mine office. O wretched fool,
That lov'st to make thine honesty a vice!
Oh monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world!
To be direct and honest, is not safe.
I thank you for this profit, and from hence
I'll love no friend, since love breeds such offence."

If Iago is detestable enough when he has business on his hands and all his engines at work, he is still worse when he has nothing to do, and we only see into the hollowness of his heart. His indifference when Othello falls into a swoon, is perfectly diabolical.

"*Iago.* How is it, General? Have you not hurt your head?
Othello. Do'st thou mock me?
Iago. I mock you not, by Heaven," &c.

The part indeed would hardly be tolerated, even as a foil to the virtue and generosity of the other characters in the play, but for its indefatigable industry and inexhaustible resources, which divert the attention of the spectator (as well as his own) from the end he has in view to the means by which it must be accomplished. —Edmund the Bastard in *Lear* is something of the same character, placed in less prominent circumstances. Zanga is a vulgar caricature of it.

TIMON OF ATHENS

Timon of Athens always appeared to us to be written with as intense feeling of his subject as any one play of Shakespear. It is one of the few in which he seems to be in earnest throughout, never to trifle nor go out of his way. He does not relax in his efforts, nor lose sight of the unity of his design. It is the only play of our author in which spleen is the predominant feeling of the mind. It is as much a satire as a play: and contains some of the finest pieces of invective possible to be conceived, both in the snarling, captious answers of the cynic Apemantus, and in the impassioned and most terrible imprecations of Timon. The latter remind the classical reader of the force and swelling impetuosity of the moral declamations in *Juvenal*, while the former have all the keenness and caustic severity of the old Stoic philosophers. The soul of Diogenes appears to have been seated on the lips of Apemantus. The churlish profession of misanthropy in the cynic is contrasted with the profound feeling of it in Timon, and also with the soldier-like and determined resentment of Alcibiades against his countrymen, who have banished him, though this forms only an incidental episode in the tragedy.

The fable consists of a single event ;—of the transition from the highest pomp and profusion of artificial refinement to the most abject state of savage life, and privation of all social intercourse. The change is as rapid as it is complete ; nor is the description of the rich and generous Timon, banqueting in gilded palaces, pampered by every luxury, prodigal of his hospitality, courted by crowds of flatterers, poets, painters, lords, ladies, who—

> "Follow his strides, his lobbies fill with tendance,
> Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear;
> And through him drink the free air"—

more striking than that of the sudden falling off of his friends and fortune, and his naked exposure in a wild forest digging roots from the earth for his sustenance, with a lofty spirit of self-denial, and bitter scorn of the world, which raise him higher in our esteem than the dazzling gloss of prosperity could do. He grudges himself the means of life, and is only busy in preparing his grave. How forcibly is the difference between what he was, and what he is, described in Apemantus's taunting questions, when he comes to reproach him with the change in his way of life !

> ———"What, think'st thou,
> That the bleak air, thy boisterous chamberlain,
> Will put thy shirt on warm ? will these moist trees
> That have out-lived the eagle, page thy heels,
> And skip when thou point'st out ? will the cold brook,
> Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste
> To cure thy o'er-night's surfeit ? Call the creatures,
> Whose naked natures live in all the spight
> Of wreakful heav'n, whose bare unhoused trunks,
> To the conflicting elements expos'd,
> Answer mere nature, bid them flatter thee."

The manners are every where preserved with distinct truth. The poet and painter are very skilfully played off against one another, both affecting great attention to the other, and each taken up with his own vanity, and the superiority of his own art. Shakespear has put into the mouth of the former a very lively description of the genius of poetry and of his own in particular.

> ———"A thing slipt idly from me.
> Our poesy is as a gum, which issues
> From whence 'tis nourish'd. The fire i' th' flint
> Shews not till it be struck: our gentle flame
> Provokes itself—and like the current flies
> Each bound it chafes."

The hollow friendship and shuffling evasions of the Athenian lords, their smooth professions and pitiful ingratitude, are very satisfactorily exposed, as well as the different disguises to which the meanness of self-love resorts in such cases to hide a want of generosity and good faith. The lurking selfishness of Apemantus does not pass undetected amidst the grossness of his sarcasms and his contempt for the pretensions of others. Even the two courtezans who accompany Alcibiades to the cave of Timon are very characteristically sketched; and the thieves who come to visit him are also "true men" in their way.—An exception to this general picture of selfish depravity is found in the old and honest steward Flavius, to whom Timon pays a full tribute of tenderness. Shakespear was unwilling to draw a picture "*ugly all over with hypocrisy.*" He owed this character to the good-natured solicitations of his Muse. His mind might well have been said to be the "sphere of humanity."

The moral sententiousness of this play equals that of Lord Bacon's Treatise on the Wisdom of the Ancients, and is indeed seasoned with greater variety. Every topic of contempt or indignation is here exhausted; but while the sordid licentiousness of Apemantus, which turns every thing to gall and bitterness, shews only the natural virulence of his temper and antipathy to good or evil alike, Timon does not utter an imprecation without betraying the extravagant workings of disappointed passion, of love altered to hate. Apemantus sees nothing good in any object, and exaggerates whatever is disgusting: Timon is tormented with the perpetual contrast between things and appearances, between the fresh, tempting outside and the rottenness within, and invokes mischiefs on the heads of mankind proportioned to the sense of his wrongs and of their treacheries. He impatiently cries out, when he finds the gold,

"This yellow slave
Will knit and break religions; bless the accurs'd;
Make the hoar leprosy ador'd; place thieves,
And give them title, knee, and approbation,
With senators on the bench; this is it,
That makes the wappen'd widow wed again;
She, whom the spital-house
Would cast the gorge at, *this embalms and spices*
To th' April day again."

One of his most dreadful imprecations is that which occurs immediately on his leaving Athens.

"Let me look back upon thee, O thou wall,
That girdlest in those wolves! Dive in the earth,
And fence not Athens! Matrons, turn incontinent;
Obedience fail in children; slaves and fools
Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench,
And minister in their steads. To general filths
Convert o' th' instant green virginity!
Do't in your parents' eyes. Bankrupts, hold fast;
Rather than render back, out with your knives,
And cut your trusters' throats! Bound servants, steal:
Large-handed robbers your grave masters are
And pill by law. Maid, to thy master's bed:
Thy mistress is o' th' brothel. Son of sixteen,
Pluck the lin'd crutch from thy old limping sire,
And with it beat his brains out! Fear and piety,
Religion to the Gods, peace, justice, truth,
Domestic awe, night-rest, and neighbourhood,
Instructions, manners, mysteries and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries;
And let confusion live!—Plagues, incident to men,
Your potent and infectious fevers heap
On Athens, ripe for stroke! Thou cold sciatica,
Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt
As lamely as their manners! Lust and liberty
Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth,
That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may strive,
And drown themselves in riot! Itches, blains,
Sow all th' Athenian bosoms; and their crop
Be general leprosy: breath infect breath,
That their society (as their friendship) may
Be merely poison!"

Timon is here just as ideal in his passion for ill as he had been before in his belief of good. Apemantus was satisfied with the mischief existing in the world, and

with his own ill-nature. One of the most decisive intimations of Timon's morbid jealousy of appearances is in his answer to Apemantus, who asks him,

> "What things in the world can'st thou nearest compare with thy flatterers?
>
> *Timon.* Women nearest: but men, men are the things themselves."

Apemantus, it is said, "loved few things better than to abhor himself." This is not the case with Timon, who neither loves to abhor himself nor others. All his vehement misanthropy is forced, up-hill work. From the slippery turns of fortune, from the turmoils of passion and adversity, he wishes to sink into the quiet of the grave. On that subject his thoughts are intent, on that he finds time and place to grow romantic. He digs his own grave by the sea-shore; contrives his funeral ceremonies amidst the pomp of desolation, and builds his mausoleum of the elements.

> "Come not to me again; but say to Athens,
> Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
> Upon the beached verge of the salt flood;
> Which once a-day with his embossed froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover.—Thither come,
> And let my grave-stone be your oracle."

And again, Alcibiades, after reading his epitaph, says of him,

> "These well express in thee thy latter spirits:
> Though thou abhorred'st in us our human griefs,
> Scorn'd'st our brain's flow, and those our droplets, which
> From niggard nature fall; yet rich conceit
> Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye
> On thy low grave"——

thus making the winds his funeral dirge, his mourner the murmuring ocean; and seeking in the everlasting solemnities of nature oblivion of the transitory splendour of his life-time.

CORIOLANUS

SHAKESPEAR has in this play shewn himself well versed in history and state-affairs. CORIOLANUS is a store-house of

political common-places. Any one who studies it may save himself the trouble of reading Burke's Reflections, or Paine's Rights of Man, or the Debates in both Houses of Parliament since the French Revolution or our own. The arguments for and against aristocracy or democracy, on the privileges of the few and the claims of the many, on liberty and slavery, power and the abuse of it, peace and war, are here very ably handled, with the spirit of a poet and the acuteness of a philosopher. Shakespear himself seems to have had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question, perhaps from some feeling of contempt for his own origin; and to have spared no occasion of bating the rabble. What he says of them is very true: what he says of their betters is also very true, though he dwells less upon it.—The cause of the people is indeed but little calculated as a subject for poetry: it admits of rhetoric, which goes into argument and explanation, but it presents no immediate or distinct images to the mind, "no jutting frieze, buttress, or coigne of vantage" for poetry "to make its pendant bed and procreant cradle in." The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power. The imagination is an exaggerating and exclusive faculty: it takes from one thing to add to another: it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favourite object. The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty: it judges of things not according to their immediate impression on the mind, but according to their relations to one another. The one is a monopolising faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of present excitement by inequality and disproportion; the other is a distributive faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of ultimate good, by justice and proportion. The one is an aristocratical, the other a republican faculty. The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle. It aims at effect, it exists by contrast. It admits of no medium. It is every thing by excess. It rises above the ordinary standard of sufferings and crimes. It presents a dazzling appearance. It shews its head turretted, crowned, and crested. Its front is gilt and bloodstained.

Before it "it carries noise, and behind it leaves tears." It has its altars and its victims, sacrifices, human sacrifices. Kings, priests, nobles, are its train-bearers, tyrants and slaves its executioners.—"Carnage is its daughter." —Poetry is right-royal. It puts the individual for the species, the one above the infinite many, might before right. A lion hunting a flock of sheep or a herd of wild asses is a more poetical object than they; and we even take part with the lordly beast, because our vanity or some other feeling makes us disposed to place ourselves in the situation of the strongest party. So we feel some concern for the poor citizens of Rome when they meet together to compare their wants and grievances, till Coriolanus comes in and with blows and big words drives this set of "poor rats," this rascal scum, to their homes and beggary before him. There is nothing heroical in a multitude of miserable rogues not wishing to be starved, or complaining that they are like to be so: but when a single man comes forward to brave their cries and to make them submit to the last indignities, from mere pride and self-will, our admiration of his prowess is immediately converted into contempt for their pusillanimity. The insolence of power is stronger than the plea of necessity. The tame submission to usurped authority or even the natural resistance to it has nothing to excite or flatter the imagination: it is the assumption of a right to insult or oppress others that carries an imposing air of superiority with it. We had rather be the oppressor than the oppressed. The love of power in ourselves and the admiration of it in others are both natural to man: the one makes him a tyrant, the other a slave. Wrong dressed out in pride, pomp, and circumstance, has more attraction than abstract right.—Coriolanus complains of the fickleness of the people: yet, the instant he cannot gratify his pride and obstinacy at their expense, he turns his arms against his country. If his country was not worth defending, why did he build his pride on its defence? He is a conqueror and a hero; he conquers other countries, and makes this a plea for enslaving his own; and when he is

prevented from doing so, he leagues with its enemies to destroy his country. He rates the people "as if he were a God to punish, and not a man of their infirmity." He scoffs at one of their tribunes for maintaining their rights and franchises: "Mark you his absolute *shall?*" not marking his own absolute *will* to take every thing from them, his impatience of the slightest opposition to his own pretensions being in proportion to their arrogance and absurdity. If the great and powerful had the beneficence and wisdom of Gods, then all this would have been well: if with a greater knowledge of what is good for the people, they had as great a care for their interest as they have themselves, if they were seated above the world, sympathising with the welfare, but not feeling the passions of men, receiving neither good nor hurt from them, but bestowing their benefits as free gifts on them, they might then rule over them like another Providence. But this is not the case. Coriolanus is unwilling that the senate should shew their "cares" for the people, lest their "cares" should be construed into "fears," to the subversion of all due authority; and he is no sooner disappointed in his schemes to deprive the people not only of the cares of the state, but of all power to redress themselves, than Volumnia is made madly to exclaim,

> "Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome,
> And occupations perish."

This is but natural: it is but natural for a mother to have more regard for her son than for a whole city; but then the city should be left to take some care of itself. The care of the state cannot, we here see, be safely entrusted to maternal affection, or to the domestic charities of high life. The great have private feelings of their own, to which the interests of humanity and justice must courtesy. Their interests are so far from being the same as those of the community, that they are in direct and necessary opposition to them; their power is at the expense of *our* weakness; their riches of *our* poverty; their pride of *our* degradation; their splendour of *our* wretchedness; their tyranny of *our* servitude. If they had the superior knowledge ascribed to them (which they

have not) it would only render them so much more formidable; and from Gods would convert them into Devils. The whole dramatic moral of CORIOLANUS is that those who have little shall have less, and that those who have much shall take all that others have left. The people are poor; therefore they ought to be starved. They are slaves; therefore they ought to be beaten. They work hard; therefore they ought to be treated like beasts of burden. They are ignorant; therefore they ought not to be allowed to feel that they want food, or clothing, or rest, that they are enslaved, oppressed, and miserable. This is the logic of the imagination and the passions; which seek to aggrandise what excites admiration and to heap contempt on misery, to raise power into tyranny, and to make tyranny absolute; to thrust down that which is low still lower, and to make wretches desperate: to exalt magistrates into kings, kings into gods; to degrade subjects to the rank of slaves, and slaves to the condition of brutes. The history of mankind is a romance, a mask, a tragedy, constructed upon the principles of *poetical justice*; it is a noble or royal hunt, in which what is sport to the few is death to the many, and in which the spectators halloo and encourage the strong to set upon the weak, and cry havoc in the chase though they do not share in the spoil. We may depend upon it that what men delight to read in books, they will put in practice in reality.

One of the most natural traits in this play is the difference of the interest taken in the success of Coriolanus by his wife and mother. The one is only anxious for his honour; the other is fearful for his life.

> "*Volumnia.* Methinks I hither hear your husband's drum:
> I see him pluck Aufidius down by th' hair:
> Methinks I see him stamp thus—and call thus—
> Come on, ye cowards; ye were got in fear
> Though you were born in Rome; his bloody brow
> With his mail'd hand then wiping, forth he goes
> Like to a harvest man, that's task'd to mow
> Or all, or lose his hire.
>
> *Virgilia.* His bloody brow! Oh Jupiter, no blood.
>
> *Volumnia.* Away, you fool; it more becomes a man
> Than gilt his trophy. The breast of Hecuba,

When she did suckle Hector, look'd not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead, when it spit forth blood
At Grecian swords contending."

When she hears the trumpets that proclaim her son's return, she says in the true spirit of a Roman matron,

" These are the ushers of Martius : before him
He carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears.
Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie,
Which being advanc'd, declines, and then men die."

Coriolanus himself is a complete character : his love of reputation, his contempt of popular opinion, his pride and modesty, are consequences of each other. His pride consists in the inflexible sternness of his will ; his love of glory is a determined desire to bear down all opposition, and to extort the admiration both of friends and foes. His contempt for popular favour, his unwillingness to hear his own praises, spring from the same source. He cannot contradict the praises that are bestowed upon him ; therefore he is impatient at hearing them. He would enforce the good opinion of others by his actions, but does not want their acknowledgments in words.

" Pray now, no more : my mother,
Who has a charter to extol her blood,
When she does praise me, grieves me."

His magnanimity is of the same kind. He admires in an enemy that courage which he honours in himself; he places himself on the hearth of Aufidius with the same confidence that he would have met him in the field, and feels that by putting himself in his power, he takes from him all temptation for using it against him.

In the title-page of CORIOLANUS, it is said at the bottom of the Dramatis Personæ, " The whole history exactly followed and many of the principal speeches copied from the life of Coriolanus in Plutarch." It will be interesting to our readers to see how far this is the case. Two of the principal scenes, those between Coriolanus and Aufidius and between Coriolanus and his mother, are thus given in Sir Thomas North's Translation of Plutarch, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, 1579. The first is as follows :—

"It was even twilight when he entered the city of Antium, and many people met him in the streets, but no man knew him. So he went directly to Tullus Aufidius' house, and when he came thither, he got him up straight to the chimney-hearth, and sat him down, and spake not a word to any man, his face all muffled over. They of the house spying him, wondered what he should be, and yet they durst not bid him rise. For ill-favouredly muffled and disguised as he was, yet there appeared a certain majesty in his countenance and in his silence: whereupon they went to Tullus, who was at supper, to tell him of the strange disguising of this man. Tullus rose presently from the board, and coming towards him, asked him what he was, and wherefore he came. Then Martius unmuffled himself, and after he had paused awhile, making no answer, he said unto himself, If thou knowest me not yet, Tullus, and seeing me, dost not perhaps believe me to be the man I am indeed, I must of necessity discover myself to be that I am. 'I am Caius Martius, 'who hath done to thyself particularly, and to all the Volces generally, 'great hurt and mischief, which I cannot deny for my surname of Corio-'lanus that I bear. For I never had other benefit nor recompence of 'the true and painful service I have done, and the extreme dangers I have 'been in, but this only surname: a good memory and witness of the 'malice and displeasure thou shouldest bear me. Indeed the name only 'remaineth with me; for the rest, the envy and cruelty of the people of 'Rome have taken from me, by the suffrance of the dastardly nobility and 'magistrates, who have forsaken me, and let me be banished by the 'people. This extremity hath now driven me to come as a poor suitor, 'to take thy chimney-hearth, not of any hope I have to save my life 'thereby. For if I had feared death, I would not have come hither to 'put myself in hazard; but pricked forward with desire to be revenged 'of them that thus have banished me, which now I do begin, in putting 'my person into the hands of their enemies. Wherefore if thou hast 'any heart to be wrecked of the injuries thy enemies have done thee, 'speed thee now, and let my misery serve thy turn, and so use it as my 'service may be a benefit to the Volces: promising thee, that I will fight 'with better good will for all you, than I did when I was against you, 'knowing that they fight more valiantly who know the force of the 'enemy, than such as have never proved it. And if it be so that thou 'dare not, and that thou art weary to prove fortune any more, then am 'I also weary to live any longer. And it were no wisdom in thee to 'save the life of him who hath been heretofore thy mortal enemy, and 'whose service now can nothing help, nor pleasure thee.' Tullus hearing what he said, was a marvellous glad man, and taking him by the hand, he said unto him: 'Stand up, O Martius, and be of good cheer, for in 'proffering thyself unto us, thou doest us great honour: and by this 'means thou mayest hope also of greater things at all the Volces' hands.' So he feasted him for that time, and entertained him in the honourablest manner he could, talking with him of no other matter at that present: but within few days after, they fell to consultation together in what sort they should begin their wars."

The meeting between Coriolanus and his mother is also nearly the same as in the play.

"Now was Martius set then in the chair of state, with all the honours of a general, and when he had spied the women coming afar off, he marvelled what the matter meant: but afterwards knowing his wife which came foremost, he determined at the first to persist in his obstinate and inflexible rancour. But overcome in the end with natural affection, and being altogether altered to see them, his heart would not serve him to tarry their coming to his chair, but coming down in haste, he went to meet them, and first he kissed his mother, and embraced her a pretty while, then his wife and little children. And nature so wrought with him, that the tears fell from his eyes, and he could not keep himself from making much of them, but yielded to the affection of his blood, as if he had been violently carried with the fury of a most swift-running stream. After he had thus lovingly received them, and perceiving that his mother Volumnia would begin to speak to him, he called the chiefest of the council of the Volces to hear what she would say. Then she spake in this sort: 'If we held our peace, my son, and determined not to speak, 'the state of our poor bodies, and present sight of our raiment, would 'easily betray to thee what life we have led at home, since thy exile and 'abode abroad; but think now with thyself, how much more unfortunate 'than all the women living, we are come hither, considering that the sight 'which should be most pleasant to all others to behold, spiteful fortune 'had made most fearful to us: making myself to see my son, and my 'daughter here her husband, besieging the walls of his native country: 'so as that which is the only comfort to all others in their adversity and 'misery, to pray unto the Gods, and to call to them for aid, is the only 'thing which plungeth us into most deep perplexity. For we cannot, 'alas, together pray, both for victory to our country, and for safety of thy 'life also: but a world of grievous curses, yea more than any mortal enemy 'can heap upon us, are forcibly wrapped up in our prayers. For the 'bitter sop of most hard choice is offered thy wife and children, to forego 'one of the two: either to lose the person of thyself, or the nurse of 'their native country. For myself, my son, I am determined not to 'tarry till fortune in my lifetime do make an end of this war. For if I 'cannot persuade thee rather to do good unto both parties, than to over-'throw and destroy the one, preferring love and nature before the malice 'and calamity of wars, thou shalt see, my son, and trust unto it, thou 'shalt no sooner march forward to assault thy country, but thy foot shall 'tread upon thy mother's womb, that brought thee first into this world. 'And I may not defer to see the day, either that my son be led prisoner 'in triumph by his natural countrymen, or that he himself do triumph 'of them, and of his natural country. For if it were so, that my request 'tended to save thy country, in destroying the Volces, I must confess, 'thou wouldest hardly and doubtfully resolve on that. For as to destroy 'thy natural country, it is altogether unmeet and unlawful, so were it not 'just and less honourable to betray those that put their trust in thee. 'But my only demand consisteth, to make a gaol delivery of all evils,

'which delivereth equal benefit and safety, both to the one and the 'other, but most honourable for the Volces. For it shall appear, that 'having victory in their hands, they have of special favour granted us 'singular graces, peace and amity, albeit themselves have no less part of 'both than we. Of which good, if so it came to pass, thyself is the only 'author, and so hast thou the only honour. But if it fail, and fall out 'contrary, thyself alone deservedly shalt carry the shameful reproach and 'burthen of either party. So, though the end of war be uncertain, yet 'this notwithstanding is most certain, that if it be thy chance to con-'quer, this benefit shalt thou reap of thy goodly conquest, to be chronicled 'the plague and destroyer of thy country. And if fortune overthrow 'thee, then the world will say, that through desire to revenge thy private 'injuries, thou hast for ever undone thy good friends, who did most 'lovingly and courteously receive thee.' Martius gave good ear unto his mother's words, without interrupting her speech at all, and after she had said what she would, he held his peace a pretty while, and answered not a word. Hereupon she began again to speak unto him, and said: 'My son, why dost thou not answer me? Dost thou think it good 'altogether to give place unto thy choler and desire of revenge, and 'thinkest thou it not honesty for thee to grant thy mother's request in 'so weighty a cause? Dost thou take it honourable for a nobleman to 'remember the wrongs and injuries done him, and dost not in like case 'think it an honest nobleman's part to be thankful for the goodness that 'parents do shew to their children, acknowledging the duty and reverence 'they ought to bear unto them? No man living is more bound to shew 'himself thankful in all parts and respects than thyself; who so univer-'sally shewest all ingratitude. Moreover, my son, thou hast sorely taken 'of thy country, exacting grievous payments upon them, in revenge of 'the injuries offered thee; besides, thou hast not hitherto shewed thy 'poor mother any courtesy. And therefore, it is not only honest but 'due unto me, that without compulsion I should obtain my so just and 'reasonable request of thee. But since by reason I cannot persuade thee 'to it, to what purpose do I defer my last hope.' And with these words, herself, his wife and children, fell down upon their knees before him: Martius seeing that, could refrain no longer, but went straight and lifted her up, crying out, 'Oh mother, what have you done to me?' And holding her hard by the hand, 'Oh mother,' said he, 'you have won a 'happy victory for your country, but mortal and unhappy for your son: 'for I see myself vanquished by you alone.' These words being spoken openly, he spake a little apart with his mother and wife, and then let them return again to Rome, for so they did request him; and so remaining in the camp that night, the next morning he dislodged, and marched homeward unto the Volces' country again."

Shakespear has, in giving a dramatic form to this passage, adhered very closely and properly to the text. He did not think it necessary to improve upon the truth of nature. Several of the scenes in *Julius Cæsar*, par-

ticularly Portia's appeal to the confidence of her husband by shewing him the wound she had given herself, and the appearance of the ghost of Cæsar to Brutus, are in like manner, taken from the history.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

This is one of the most loose and desultory of our author's plays: it rambles on just as it happens, but it overtakes, together with some indifferent matter, a prodigious number of fine things in its way. Troilus himself is no character: he is merely a common lover: but Cressida and her uncle Pandarus are hit off with proverbial truth. By the speeches given to the leaders of the Grecian host, Nestor, Ulysses, Agamemnon, Achilles, Shakespear seems to have known them as well as if he had been a spy sent by the Trojans into the enemy's camp—to say nothing of their affording very lofty examples of didactic eloquence. The following is a very stately and spirited declamation:

"*Ulysses.* Troy, yet upon her basis, had been down,
And the great Hector's sword had lack'd a master,
But for these instances.
The specialty of rule hath been neglected.
* * * * * * *
The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center,
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office, and custom, in all line of order:
And therefore is the glorious planet, Sol,
In noble eminence, enthron'd and spher'd
Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,
And posts, like the commandment of a king,
Sans check, to good and bad. But, when the planets,
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues, and what portents? what mutinies?
What raging of the sea? shaking of the earth?
Commotion in the winds? frights, changes, horrors,

Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and marred calm of states
Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shaken,
(Which is the ladder to all high designs)
The enterprize is sick! How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
(But by degree) stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows! each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
Would lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength would be the lord of imbecility,
And the rude son would strike his father dead:
Force would be right; or rather right and wrong
(Between whose endless jar Justice resides)
Would lose their names, and so would Justice too.
Then every thing includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite (an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power)
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking:
And this neglection of degree it is,
That by a pace goes backward, in a purpose
It hath to climb. The general's disdained
By him one step below; he, by the next;
That next, by him beneath: so every step,
Exampled by the first pace that is sick
Of his superior, grows to an envious fever
Of pale and bloodless emulation;
And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,
Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length,
Troy in our weakness lives, not in her strength."

It cannot be said of Shakespear, as was said of some one, that he was "without o'erflowing full." He was full, even to o'erflowing. He gave heaped measure, running over. This was his greatest fault. He was only in danger "of losing distinction in his thoughts" (to borrow his own expression)

"As doth a battle when they charge on heaps
The enemy flying."

There is another passage, the speech of Ulysses to Achilles, shewing him the thankless nature of popularity, which has a still greater depth of moral observation and richness of illustration than the former. It is long, but worth the quoting. The sometimes giving an entire argument from the unacted plays of our author may with one class of readers have almost the use of restoring a lost passage; and may serve to convince another class of critics, that the poet's genius was not confined to the production of stage effect by preternatural means.—

"*Ulysses.* Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms for Oblivion;
A great-siz'd monster of ingratitudes:
Those scraps are good deeds past,
Which are devour'd as fast as they are made,
Forgot as soon as done. Persev'rance, dear my lord,
Keeps Honour bright: to have done, is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
In monumental mockery. Take the instant way;
For Honour travels in a strait so narrow,
Where one but goes abreast; keep then the path,
For Emulation hath a thousand sons,
That one by one pursue; if you give way,
Or hedge aside from the direct forth right,
Like to an entered tide, they all rush by,
And leave you hindmost;——
Or, like a gallant horse fall'n in first rank,
O'er-run and trampled on: then what they do in present,
Tho' less than your's in past must o'ertop your's:
For Time is like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by th' hand,
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,
Grasps in the comer: the welcome ever smiles,
And farewell goes out sighing. O, let not virtue seek
Remuneration for the thing it was; for beauty, wit,
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating time:
One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.
That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
Tho' they are made and moulded of things past.
The present eye praises the present object.
Then marvel not, thou great and complete man,
That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax;
Since things in motion sooner catch the eye,
Than what not stirs. The cry went out on thee,

> And still it might, and yet it may again,
> If thou would'st not entomb thyself alive,
> And case thy reputation in thy tent."

The throng of images in the above lines is prodigious; and though they sometimes jostle against one another, they every where raise and carry on the feeling, which is intrinsically true and profound. The debates between the Trojan chiefs on the restoring of Helen are full of knowledge of human motives and character. Troilus enters well into the philosophy of war, when he says in answer to something that falls from Hector,

> "Why there you touch'd the life of our design:
> Were it not glory that we more affected,
> Than the performance of our heaving spleens,
> I would not wish a drop of Trojan blood
> Spent more in her defence. But, worthy Hector,
> She is a theme of honour and renown,
> A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds."

The character of Hector, in a few slight indications which appear of it, is made very amiable. His death is sublime, and shews in a striking light the mixture of barbarity and heroism of the age. The threats of Achilles are fatal; they carry their own means of execution with them.

> "Come here about me, you my myrmidons,
> Mark what I say.—Attend me where I wheel:
> Strike not a stroke, but keep yourselves in breath;
> And when I have the bloody Hector found,
> Empale him with your weapons round about,
> In fellest manner execute your arms.
> Follow me, sirs, and my proceeding eye."

He then finds Hector and slays him, as if he had been hunting down a wild beast. There is something revolting as well as terrific in the ferocious coolness with which he singles out his prey: nor does the splendour of the achievement reconcile us to the cruelty of the means.

The characters of Cressida and Pandarus are very amusing and instructive. The disinterested willingness of Pandarus to serve his friend in an affair which lies next his heart is immediately brought forward. "Go thy way, Troilus, go thy way; had I a sister were a

grace, or a daughter were a goddess, he should take his choice. O admirable man! Paris, Paris is dirt to him, and I warrant Helen, to change, would give money to boot." This is the language he addresses to his niece: nor is she much behind-hand in coming into the plot. Her head is as light and fluttering as her heart. "It is the prettiest villain, she fetches her breath so short as a new-ta'en sparrow." Both characters are originals, and quite different from what they are in Chaucer. In Chaucer, Cressida is represented as a grave, sober, considerate personage (a widow—he cannot tell her age, nor whether she has children or no) who has an alternate eye to her character, her interest, and her pleasure: Shakespear's Cressida is a giddy girl, an unpractised jilt, who falls in love with Troilus, as she afterwards deserts him, from mere levity and thoughtlessness of temper. She may be wooed and won to any thing and from any thing, at a moment's warning; the other knows very well what she would be at, and sticks to it, and is more governed by substantial reasons than by caprice or vanity. Pandarus again, in Chaucer's story, is a friendly sort of go-between, tolerably busy, officious, and forward in bringing matters to bear: but in Shakespear he has "a stamp exclusive and professional:" he wears the badge of his trade; he is a regular knight of the game. The difference of the manner in which the subject is treated arises perhaps less from intention, than from the different genius of the two poets. There is no *double entendre* in the characters of Chaucer: they are either quite serious or quite comic. In Shakespear the ludicrous and ironical are constantly blended with the stately and the impassioned. We see Chaucer's characters as they saw themselves, not as they appeared to others or might have appeared to the poet. He is as deeply implicated in the affairs of his personages as they could be themselves. He had to go a long journey with each of them, and became a kind of necessary confidant. There is little relief, or light and shade in his pictures. The conscious smile is not seen lurking under the brow of grief or

impatience. Every thing with him is intense and continuous—a working out of what went before.—Shakespear never committed himself to his characters. He trifled, laughed, or wept with them as he chose. He has no prejudices for or against them ; and it seems a matter of perfect indifference whether he shall be in jest or earnest. According to him "the web of our lives is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together." His genius was dramatic, as Chaucer's was historical. He saw both sides of a question, the different views taken of it according to the different interests of the parties concerned, and he was at once an actor and spectator in the scene. If any thing, he is too various and flexible: too full of transitions, of glancing lights, of salient points. If Chaucer followed up his subject too doggedly, perhaps Shakespear was too volatile and heedless. The Muse's wing too often lifted him from off his feet. He made infinite excursions to the right and the left.

> ———"He hath done
> Mad and fantastic execution,
> Engaging and redeeming of himself
> With such a careless force and forceless care,
> As if luck in very spite of cunning
> Bade him win all."

Chaucer attended chiefly to the real and natural, that is, to the involuntary and inevitable impressions on the mind in given circumstances ; Shakespear exhibited also the possible and the fantastical,—not only what things are in themselves, but whatever they might seem to be, their different reflections, their endless combinations. He lent his fancy, wit, invention, to others, and borrowed their feelings in return. Chaucer excelled in the force of habitual sentiment; Shakespear added to it every variety of passion, every suggestion of thought or accident. Chaucer described external objects with the eye of a painter, or he might be said to have embodied them with the hand of a sculptor, every part is so thoroughly made out, and tangible:—Shakespear's imagination threw over them a lustre

> —"Prouder than when blue Iris bends."

Every thing in Chaucer has a downright reality. A simile or a sentiment is as if it were given in upon evidence. In Shakespear the commonest matter-of-fact has a romantic grace about it; or seems to float with the breath of imagination in a freer element. No one could have more depth of feeling or observation than Chaucer, but he wanted resources of invention to lay open the stores of nature or the human heart with the same radiant light that Shakespear has done. However fine or profound the thought, we know what is coming, whereas the effect of reading Shakespear is "like the eye of vassalage at unawares encountering majesty." Chaucer's mind was consecutive, rather than discursive. He arrived at truth through a certain process; Shakespear saw every thing by intuition. Chaucer had a great variety of power, but he could do only one thing at once. He set himself to work on a particular subject. His ideas were kept separate, labelled, ticketed and parcelled out in a set form, in pews and compartments by themselves. They did not play into one another's hands. They did not re-act upon one another, as the blower's breath moulds the yielding glass. There is something hard and dry in them. What is the most wonderful thing in Shakespear's faculties is their excessive sociability, and how they gossiped and compared notes together.

We must conclude this criticism; and we will do it with a quotation or two. One of the most beautiful passages in Chaucer's tale is the description of Cresseide's first avowal of her love.

> "And as the new abashed nightingale,
> That stinteth first when she beginneth sing,
> When that she heareth any herde's tale,
> Or in the hedges any wight stirring,
> And, after, sicker doth her voice outring;
> Right so Cresseide, when that her dread stent,
> Opened her heart, and told him her intent."

See also the two next stanzas, and particularly that divine one beginning—

> "Her armes small, her back both straight and soft," &c.

Compare this with the following speech of Troilus to Cressida in the play:—

> "O, that I thought it could be in a woman;
> And if it can, I will presume in you,
> To feed for aye her lamp and flame of love,
> To keep her constancy in plight and youth,
> Out-living beauties outward, with a mind
> That doth renew swifter than blood decays.
> Or, that persuasion could but thus convince me,
> That my integrity and truth to you
> Might be affronted with the match and weight
> Of such a winnow'd purity in love;
> How were I then uplifted! But alas,
> I am as true as Truth's simplicity,
> And simpler than the infancy of Truth."

These passages may not seem very characteristic at first sight, though we think they are so. We will give two, that cannot be mistaken. Patroclus says to Achilles,

> —— "Rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
> Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
> And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
> Be shook to air."

Troilus, addressing the God of Day on the approach of the morning that parts him from Cressida, says with much scorn,

> "What! proffer'st thou thy light here for to sell?
> Go sell it them that smallé selés grave."

If nobody but Shakespear could have written the former, nobody but Chaucer would have thought of the latter.—Chaucer was the most literal of poets, as Richardson was of prose-writers.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

This is a very noble play. Though not in the first class of Shakespear's productions, it stands next to them, and is, we think, the finest of his historical plays, that is, of those in which he made poetry the organ of history, and

assumed a certain tone of character and sentiment, in conformity to known facts, instead of trusting to his observations of general nature or to the unlimited indulgence of his own fancy. What he has added to the actual story, is upon a par with it. His genius was, as it were, a match for history as well as nature, and could grapple at will with either. The play is full of that pervading comprehensive power by which the poet could always make himself master of time and circumstances. It presents a fine picture of Roman pride and Eastern magnificence: and in the struggle between the two, the empire of the world seems suspended, "like the swan's downfeather,

> "That stands upon the swell at full of tide,
> And neither way inclines."

The characters breathe, move, and live. Shakespear does not stand reasoning on what his characters would do or say, but at once *becomes* them, and speaks and acts for them. He does not present us with groups of stage-puppets of poetical machines making set speeches on human life, and acting from a calculation of problematical motives, but he brings living men and women on the scene, who speak and act from real feelings, according to the ebbs and flows of passion, without the least tincture of pedantry of logic or rhetoric. Nothing is made out by inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis, but every thing takes place just as it would have done in reality, according to the occasion.—The character of Cleopatra is a master-piece. What an extreme contrast it affords to Imogen! One would think it almost impossible for the same person to have drawn both. She is voluptuous, ostentatious, conscious, boastful of her charms, haughty, tyrannical, fickle. The luxurious pomp and gorgeous extravagance of the Egyptian queen are displayed in all their force and lustre, as well as the irregular grandeur of the soul of Mark Antony. Take only the first four lines that they speak as an example of the regal style of love-making.

> "*Cleopatra.* If it be love indeed, tell me how much?
> *Antony.* There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

Cleopatra. I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.
Antony. Then must thou needs find out new heav'n, new earth."

The rich and poetical description of her person beginning—

"The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burnt on the water; the poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumed, that
The winds were love-sick"—

seems to prepare the way for, and almost to justify the subsequent infatuation of Antony when in the sea-fight at Actium, he leaves the battle, and "like a doating mallard" follows her flying sails.

Few things in Shakespear (and we know of nothing in any other author like them) have more of that local truth of imagination and character than the passage in which Cleopatra is represented conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence—"He's speaking now, or murmuring—*Where's my serpent of old Nile?*" Or again, when she says to Antony, after the defeat at Actium, and his summoning up resolution to risk another fight—"It is my birth-day; I had thought to have held it poor; but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra." Perhaps the finest burst of all is Antony's rage after his final defeat when he comes in, and surprises the messenger of Cæsar kissing her hand—

"To let a fellow that will take rewards,
And say God quit you, be familiar with,
My play-fellow, your hand; this kingly seal,
And plighter of high hearts."

It is no wonder that he orders him to be whipped; but his low condition is not the true reason: there is another feeling which lies deeper, though Antony's pride would not let him shew it, except by his rage; he suspects the fellow to be Cæsar's proxy.

Cleopatra's whole character is the triumph of the voluptuous, of the love of pleasure and the power of giving it, over every other consideration. Octavia is a dull foil to her, and Fulvia a shrew and shrill-tongued. What a picture do those lines give of her—

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom steal
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies."

What a spirit and fire in her conversation with Antony's messenger who brings her the unwelcome news of his marriage with Octavia! How all the pride of beauty and of high rank breaks out in her promised reward to him—

——"There's gold, and here
My bluest veins to kiss!"—

She had great and unpardonable faults, but the grandeur of her death almost redeems them. She learns from the depth of despair the strength of her affections. She keeps her queen-like state in the last disgrace, and her sense of the pleasurable in the last moments of her life. She tastes a luxury in death. After applying the asp, she says with fondness—

"Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?
As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle.
Oh Antony!"

It is worth while to observe that Shakespear has contrasted the extreme magnificence of the descriptions in this play with pictures of extreme suffering and physical horror, not less striking—partly perhaps to place the effeminate character of Mark Antony in a more favourable light, and at the same time to preserve a certain balance of feeling in the mind. Cæsar says, hearing of his rival's conduct at the court of Cleopatra,

——"Antony,
Leave thy lascivious wassels. When thou once
Wert beaten from Mutina, where thou slew'st
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against,
Though daintily brought up, with patience more
Than savages could suffer. Thou did'st drink
The stale of horses, and the gilded puddle
Which beast would cough at. Thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge,
Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,
The barks of trees thou browsed'st. On the Alps,

> It is reported, thou didst eat strange flesh,
> Which some did die to look on : and all this,
> It wounds thine honour, that I speak it now,
> Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek
> So much as lank'd not."

The passage after Antony's defeat by Augustus, where he is made to say—

> "Yes, yes ; he at Philippi kept
> His sword e'en like a dancer ; while I struck
> The lean and wrinkled Cassius, and 'twas I
> That the mad Brutus ended"—

is one of those fine retrospections which shew us the winding and eventful march of human life. The jealous attention which has been paid to the unities both of time and place has taken away the principle of perspective in the drama, and all the interest which objects derive from distance, from contrast, from privation, from change of fortune, from long-cherished passion ; and contrasts our view of life from a strange and romantic dream, long, obscure, and infinite, into a smartly contested, three hours' inaugural disputation on its merits by the different candidates for theatrical applause.

The latter scenes of ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA are full of the changes of accident and passion. Success and defeat follow one another with startling rapidity. Fortune sits upon her wheel more blind and giddy than usual. This precarious state and the approaching dissolution of his greatness are strikingly displayed in the dialogue of Antony with Eros.

> " *Antony.* Eros, thou yet behold'st me ?
> *Eros.* Ay, noble lord.
> *Antony.* Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
> A vapour sometime, like a bear or lion,
> A towered citadel, a pendant rock,
> A forked mountain, or blue promontory
> With trees upon't, that nod unto the world
> And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
> They are black vesper's pageants.
> *Eros.* Ay, my lord.
> *Antony.* That which is now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
> As water is in water.

Eros. It does, my lord.
Antony. My good knave, Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body," &c.

This is, without doubt, one of the finest pieces of poetry in Shakespear. The splendour of the imagery, the semblance of reality, the lofty range of picturesque objects hanging over the world, their evanescent nature, the total uncertainty of what is left behind, are just like the mouldering schemes of human greatness. It is finer than Cleopatra's passionate lamentation over his fallen grandeur, because it is more dim, unstable, unsubstantial. Antony's headstrong presumption and infatuated determination to yield to Cleopatra's wishes to fight by sea instead of land, meet a merited punishment ; and the extravagance of his resolutions, increasing with the desperateness of his circumstances, is well commented upon by Œnobarbus.

———" I see men's judgments are
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them
To suffer all alike."

The repentance of Œnobarbus after his treachery to his master is the most affecting part of the play. He cannot recover from the blow which Antony's generosity gives him, and he dies broken-hearted, " a master-leaver and a fugitive."

Shakespear's genius has spread over the whole play a richness like the overflowing of the Nile.

HAMLET

This is that Hamlet the Dane, whom we read of in our youth, and whom we may be said almost to remember in our after-years; he who made that famous soliloquy on life, who gave the advice to the players, who thought " this goodly frame, the earth, a steril promontory, and this brave o'er-hanging firmament, the air, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, a foul and pestilent congregation

of vapours;" whom "man delighted not, nor woman neither;" he who talked with the grave-diggers, and moralised on Yorick's skull; the school-fellow of Rosencraus and Guildenstern at Wittenberg; the friend of Horatio; the lover of Ophelia; he that was mad and sent to England; the slow avenger of his father's death; who lived at the court of Horwendillus five hundred years before we were born, but all whose thoughts we seem to know as well as we do our own, because we have read them in Shakespear.

Hamlet is a name; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet. This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others; whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of reflection, and thought himself "too much i' th' sun;" whoever has seen the golden lamp of day dimmed by envious mists rising in his own breast, and could find in the world before him only a dull blank with nothing left remarkable in it; whoever has known "the pangs of despised love, the insolence of office, or the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes;" he who has felt his mind sink within him, and sadness cling to his heart like a malady, who has had his hopes blighted and his youth staggered by the apparitions of strange things; who cannot be well at ease, while he sees evil hovering near him like a spectre; whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing; whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representation of them—this is the true Hamlet.

We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces. But we must make such

observations as we can. It is the one of Shakespear's plays that we think of the oftenest, because it abounds most in striking reflections on human life, and because the distresses of Hamlet are transferred, by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it so himself as a means of general reasoning. He is a great moraliser; and what makes him worth attending to is, that he moralises on his own feelings and experience. He is not a common-place pedant. If *Lear* is distinguished by the greatest depth of passion, HAMLET is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality, and unstudied development of character. Shakespear had more magnanimity than any other poet, and he has shewn more of it in this play than in any other. There is no attempt to force an interest: every thing is left for time and circumstances to unfold. The attention is excited without effort, the incidents succeed each other as matters of course, the characters think and speak and act just as they might do, if left entirely to themselves. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations are suggested by the passing scene—the gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. The whole play is an exact transcript of what might be supposed to have taken place at the court of Denmark, at the remote period of time fixed upon, before the modern refinements in morals and manners were heard of. It would have been interesting enough to have been admitted as a by-stander in such a scene, at such a time, to have heard and witnessed something of what was going on. But here we are more than spectators. We have not only "the outward pageants and the signs of grief;" but "we have that within which passes show." We read the thoughts of the heart, we catch the passions living as they rise. Other dramatic writers give us very fine versions and paraphrases of nature; but Shakespear, together with his own comments, gives us the original text, that we may judge for ourselves. This is a very great advantage.

The character of Hamlet stands quite by itself. It is

not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be: but he is a young and princely novice, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances, questioning with fortune and refining on his own feelings, and forced from the natural bias of his disposition by the strangeness of his situation. He seems incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect, as in the scene where he kills Polonius, and again, where he alters the letters which Rosencraus and Guildenstern are taking with them to England, purporting his death. At other times, when he is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and sceptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and finds out some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness again. For this reason he refuses to kill the King when he is at his prayers, and by a refinement in malice, which is in truth only an excuse for his own want of resolution, defers his revenge to a more fatal opportunity, when he shall be engaged in some act "that has no relish of salvation in it."

> "He kneels and prays,
> And now I'll do't, and so he goes to heaven,
> And so am I reveng'd: *that would be scann'd.*
> He kill'd my father, and for that,
> I, his sole son, send him to heaven.
> Why this is reward, not revenge.
> Up sword and know thou a more horrid time,
> When he is drunk, asleep, or in a rage."

He is the prince of philosophical speculators; and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form, he declines it altogether. So he scruples to trust the suggestions of the ghost, contrives the scene of the play to have surer proof of his uncle's guilt, and then rests satisfied with this confirmation of his suspicions, and the success of his experiment, instead of acting upon it. Yet he

is sensible of his own weakness, taxes himself with it, and tries to reason himself out of it.

"How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast; no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To rust in us unus'd. Now whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th' event,—
A thought which quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom,
And ever three parts coward;—I do not know
Why yet I live to say, this thing's to do;
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do it. Examples gross as earth exhort me:
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. 'Tis not to be great
Never to stir without great argument;
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain?—O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth."

Still he does nothing; and this very speculation on his own infirmity only affords him another occasion for indulging it. It is not from any want of attachment to his father or of abhorrence of his murder that Hamlet is thus dilatory, but it is more to his taste to indulge his imagination in reflecting upon the enormity of the crime and refining on his schemes of vengeance, than to put them into immediate practice. His ruling passion

is to think, not to act: and any vague pretext that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes.

The moral perfection of this character has been called in question, we think, by those who did not understand it. It is more interesting than according to rules; amiable, though not faultless. The ethical delineations of "that noble and liberal casuist" (as Shakespear has been well called) do not exhibit the drab-coloured quakerism of morality. His plays are not copied either from the Whole Duty of Man, or from The Academy of Compliments! We confess we are a little shocked at the want of refinement in those who are shocked at the want of refinement in Hamlet. The neglect of punctilious exactness in his behaviour either partakes of the "licence of the time," or else belongs to the very excess of intellectual refinement in the character, which makes the common rules of life, as well as his own purposes, sit loose upon him. He may be said to be amenable only to the tribunal of his own thoughts, and is too much taken up with the airy world of contemplation to lay as much stress as he ought on the practical consequences of things. His habitual principles of action are unhinged and out of joint with the time. His conduct to Ophelia is quite natural in his circumstances. It is that of assumed severity only. It is the effect of disappointed hope, of bitter regrets, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distractions of the scene around him! Amidst the natural and preternatural horrors of his situation, he might be excused in delicacy from carrying on a regular courtship. When "his father's spirit was in arms," it was not a time for the son to make love in. He could neither marry Ophelia, nor wound her mind by explaining the cause of his alienation, which he durst hardly trust himself to think of. It would have taken him years to have come to a direct explanation on the point. In the harassed state of his mind, he could not have done much otherwise than he did. His conduct does not contradict what he says when he sees her funeral,

"I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum."

Nothing can be more affecting or beautiful than the Queen's apostrophe to Ophelia on throwing flowers into the grave.

———"Sweets to the sweet, farewell.
I hop'd thou should'st have been my Hamlet's wife:
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave."

Shakespear was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of the human character, and he here shews us the Queen, who was so criminal in some respects, not without sensibility and affection in other relations of life.—Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh rose of May, oh flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespear could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads.[1] Her brother, Laertes, is a character we do not like so well: he is too hot and choleric, and somewhat rhodomontade. Polonius is a perfect character in its kind; nor is there any foundation for the objections which have been made to the consistency of this part. It is said that he acts very foolishly and talks very sensibly. There is no inconsistency in that. Again, that he talks wisely at one time and foolishly at another; that his advice to Laertes is very excellent, and his advice to the King and Queen on the subject of Hamlet's madness very ridiculous. But he gives the one as a father, and is sincere in it; he gives the other as a mere courtier, a busy-body, and is accordingly officious, garrulous, and impertinent.

[1] In the account of her death, a friend has pointed out an instance of the poet's exact observation of nature:—

"There is a willow growing o'er a brook,
That shews its hoary leaves i' th' glassy stream."

The inside of the leaves of the willow, next the water, is of a whitish colour, and the reflection would therefore be "hoary."

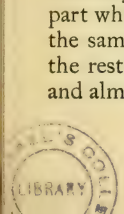
In short, Shakespear has been accused of inconsistency in this and other characters, only because he has kept up the distinction which there is in nature, between the understandings and the moral habits of men, between the absurdity of their ideas and the absurdity of their motives. Polonius is not a fool, but he makes himself so. His folly, whether in his actions or speeches, comes under the head of impropriety of intention.

We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of all, HAMLET. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. Hamlet himself seems hardly capable of being acted. Mr. Kemble unavoidably fails in this character from a want of ease and variety. The character of Hamlet is made up of undulating lines; it has the yielding flexibility of "a wave o' th' sea." Mr. Kemble plays it like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose, in one undeviating straight line, which is as remote from the natural grace and refined susceptibility of the character, as the sharp angles and abrupt starts which Mr. Kean introduces into the part. Mr. Kean's Hamlet is as much too splenetic and rash as Mr. Kemble's is too deliberate and formal. His manner is too strong and pointed. He throws a severity, approaching to virulence, into the common observations and answers. There is nothing of this in Hamlet. He is, as it were, wrapped up in his reflections, and only *thinks aloud*. There should therefore be no attempt to impress what he says upon others by a studied exaggeration of emphasis or manner; no *talking at* his hearers. There should be as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible infused into the part, and as little of the actor. A pensive air of sadness should sit reluctantly upon his brow, but no appearance of fixed and sullen gloom. He is full of weakness and melancholy, but there is no harshness in his nature. He is the most amiable of misanthropes.

THE TEMPEST

THERE can be little doubt that Shakespear was the most universal genius that ever lived. "Either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited, he is the only man. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light for him." He has not only the same absolute command over our laughter and our tears, all the resources of passion, of wit, of thought, of observation, but he has the most unbounded range of fanciful invention, whether terrible or playful, the same insight into the world of imagination that he has into the world of reality; and over all there presides the same truth of character and nature, and the same spirit of humanity. His ideal beings are as true and natural as his real characters; that is, as consistent with themselves, or if we suppose such beings to exist at all, they could not act, speak, or feel otherwise than as he makes them. He has invented for them a language, manners, and sentiments of their own, from the tremendous imprecations of the Witches in *Macbeth*, when they do "a deed without a name," to the sylph-like expressions of Ariel, who "does his spiriting gently;" the mischievous tricks and gossiping of Robin Goodfellow, or the uncouth gabbling and emphatic gesticulations of Caliban in this play.

The TEMPEST is one of the most original and perfect of Shakespear's productions, and he has shewn in it all the variety of his powers. It is full of grace and grandeur. The human and imaginary characters, the dramatic and the grotesque, are blended together with the greatest art, and without any appearance of it. Though he has here given "to airy nothing a local habitation and a name," yet that part which is only the fantastic creation of his mind, has the same palpable texture, and coheres "semblably" with the rest. As the preternatural part has the air of reality, and almost haunts the imagination with a sense of truth,



the real characters and events partake of the wildness of a dream. The stately magician, Prospero, driven from his dukedom, but around whom (so potent is his art) airy spirits throng numberless to do his bidding; his daughter Miranda ("worthy of that name") to whom all the power of his art points, and who seems the goddess of the isle; the princely Ferdinand, cast by fate upon the haven of his happiness in this idol of his love; the delicate Ariel; the savage Caliban, half brute, half demon; the drunken ship's crew—are all connected parts of the story, and can hardly be spared from the place they fill. Even the local scenery is of a piece and character with the subject. Prospero's enchanted island seems to have risen up out of the sea; the airy music, the tempest-tost vessel, the turbulent waves, all have the effect of the landscape background of some fine picture. Shakespear's pencil is (to use an allusion of his own) "like the dyer's hand, subdued to what it works in." Every thing in him, though it partakes of "the liberty of wit," is also subjected to "the law" of the understanding. For instance, even the drunken sailors, who are made reeling-ripe, share, in the disorder of their minds and bodies, in the tumult of the elements, and seem on shore to be as much at the mercy of chance as they were before at the mercy of the winds and waves. These fellows with their sea-wit are the least to our taste of any part of the play: but they are as like drunken sailors as they can be, and are an indirect foil to Caliban, whose figure acquires a classical dignity in the comparison. The character of Caliban is generally thought (and justly so) to be one of the author's masterpieces. It is not indeed pleasant to see this character on the stage any more than it is to see the god Pan personated there. But in itself it is one of the wildest and most abstracted of all Shakespear's characters, whose deformity whether of body or mind is redeemed by the power and truth of the imagination displayed in it. It is the essence of grossness, but there is not a particle of vulgarity in it. Shakespear has described the brutal mind of Caliban in contact with the pure and original forms of nature; the character

grows out of the soil where it is rooted, uncontrouled, uncouth and wild, uncramped by any of the meannesses of custom. It is "of the earth, earthy." It seems almost to have been dug out of the ground, with a soul instinctively superadded to it answering to its wants and origin. Vulgarity is not natural coarseness, but conventional coarseness, learnt from others, contrary to, or without an entire conformity of natural power and disposition; as fashion is the common-place affectation of what is elegant and refined without any feeling of the essence of it. Schlegel, the admirable German critic on Shakespear, observes that Caliban is a poetical character, and "always speaks in blank verse." He first comes in thus:

"*Caliban.* As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen,
Drop on you both: a south-west blow on ye,
And blister you all o'er!
Prospero. For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee: thou shalt be pinched
As thick as honey-combs, each pinch more stinging
Than bees that made them.
Caliban. I must eat my dinner.
This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou camest first,
Thou stroak'dst me, and mad'st much of me; would'st give me
Water with berries in't; and teach me how
To name the bigger light and how the less
That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee,
And shew'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
Curs'd be I that I did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Who first was mine own king; and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island."

And again, he promises Trinculo his services thus, if he will free him from his drudgery.

"I'll shew thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries,
I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.
I pr'ythee let me bring thee where crabs grow,
And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts:

> Shew thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
> To snare the nimble marmozet: I'll bring thee
> To clust'ring filberds; and sometimes I'll get thee
> Young sea-mells from the rock."

In conducting Stephano and Trinculo to Prospero's cell, Caliban shews the superiority of natural capacity over greater knowledge and greater folly; and in a former scene, when Ariel frightens them with his music, Caliban to encourage them accounts for it in the eloquent poetry of the senses.

> —"Be not afraid, the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
> Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices,
> That if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Would make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open, and shew riches
> Ready to drop upon me: when I wak'd,
> I cried to dream again."

This is not more beautiful than it is true. The poet here shews us the savage with the simplicity of a child, and makes the strange monster amiable. Shakespear had to paint the human animal rude and without choice in its pleasures, but not without the sense of pleasure or some germ of the affections. Master Barnardine in *Measure for Measure*, the savage of civilized life, is an admirable philosophical counterpart to Caliban.

Shakespear has, as it were by design, drawn off from Caliban the elements of whatever is ethereal and refined, to compound them in the unearthly mould of Ariel. Nothing was ever more finely conceived than this contrast between the material and the spiritual, the gross and delicate. Ariel is imaginary power, the swiftness of thought personified. When told to make good speed by Prospero, he says, "I drink the air before me." This is something like Puck's boast on a similar occasion, "I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." But Ariel differs from Puck in having a fellow feeling in the interests of those he is employed about. How exquisite is the following dialogue between him and Prospero!

"*Ariel.* Your charm so strongly works them,
That if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.
Prospero. Dost thou think so, spirit?
Ariel. Mine would, sir, were I human.
Prospero. And mine shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passion'd as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?"

It has been observed that there is a peculiar charm in the songs introduced in Shakespear, which, without conveying any distinct images, seem to recall all the feelings connected with them, like snatches of half-forgotten music heard indistinctly and at intervals. There is this effect produced by Ariel's songs, which (as we are told) seem to sound in the air, and as if the person playing them were invisible. We shall give one instance out of many of this general power.

"*Enter* FERDINAND; *and* ARIEL *invisible, playing and singing.*

ARIEL'S SONG.

Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands;
Curt'sied when you have, and kiss'd,
(The wild waves whist;)
Foot it featly here and there;
And sweet sprites the burden bear.
[*Burden dispersedly.*
Hark, hark! bowgh-wowgh: the watch-dogs bark,
Bowgh-wowgh.
Ariel. Hark, hark! I hear
The strain of strutting chanticleer
Cry cock-a-doodle-doo.
Ferdinand. Where should this music be? i' the air or the earth?
It sounds no more: and sure it waits upon
Some god o' th' island. Sitting on a bank
Weeping against the king my father's wreck,
This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air; thence I have follow'd it,
Or it hath drawn me rather:—but 'tis gone.—
No, it begins again.

ARIEL'S SONG.

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made :
Those are pearls that were his eyes,
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change,
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell—
Hark ! now I hear them, ding-dong bell.
[*Burden ding-dong.*

Ferdinand. The ditty does remember my drown'd father.
This is no mortal business, nor no sound
That the earth owes : I hear it now above me."—

The courtship between Ferdinand and Miranda is one of the chief beauties of this play. It is the very purity of love. The pretended interference of Prospero with it heightens its interest, and is in character with the magician, whose sense of preternatural power makes him arbitrary, tetchy, and impatient of opposition.

The TEMPEST is a finer play than the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which has sometimes been compared with it ; but it is not so fine a poem. There are a greater number of beautiful passages in the latter. Two of the most striking in the TEMPEST are spoken by Prospero. The one is that admirable one when the vision which he has conjured up disappears, beginning " The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces," etc., which has been so often quoted, that every school-boy knows it by heart ; the other is that which Prospero makes in abjuring his art.

" Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back ; you demi-puppets, that
By moon-shine do the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew, by whose aid
(Weak masters tho' ye be) I have be-dimm'd
The noon-tide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
Set roaring war ; to the dread rattling thunder
Have I giv'n fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt ; the strong-bas'd promontory

Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar: graves at my command
Have wak'd their sleepers; oped, and let them forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure; and when I have requir'd
Some heavenly music, which even now I do,
(To work mine end upon their senses that
This airy charm is for) I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound,
I'll drown my book."—

We must not forget to mention among other things in this play, that Shakespear has anticipated nearly all the arguments on the Utopian schemes of modern philosophy.

"*Gonzalo.* Had I the plantation of this isle, my lord—
Antonio. He'd sow it with nettle-seed.
Sebastian. Or docks or mallows.
Gonzalo. And were the king of it, what would I do?
Sebastian. 'Scape being drunk, for want of wine.
Gonzalo. I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things: for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; wealth, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all,
And women too; but innocent and pure:
No sovereignty.
Sebastian. And yet he would be king on't.
Antonio. The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning.
Gonzalo. All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
Of its own kind, all foizon, all abundance
To feed my innocent people!
Sebastian. No marrying 'mong his subjects?
Antonio. None, man; all idle; whores and knaves.
Gonzalo. I would with such perfection govern, sir,
To excel the golden age.
Sebastian. Save his majesty!"

THE MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Bottom the Weaver is a character that has not had justice done him. He is the most romantic of mechanics. And what a list of companions he has—Quince the Carpenter, Snug the Joiner, Flute the Bellows-mender, Snout the Tinker, Starveling the Tailor ; and then again, what a group of fairy attendants, Puck, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard-seed ! It has been observed that Shakespear's characters are constructed upon deep physiological principles ; and there is something in this play which looks very like it. Bottom the Weaver, who takes the lead of

> " This crew of patches, rude mechanicals,
> That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,"

follows a sedentary trade, and he is accordingly represented as conceited, serious, and fantastical. He is ready to undertake any thing and every thing, as if it was as much a matter of course as the motion of his loom and shuttle. He is for playing the tyrant, the lover, the lady, the lion. " He will roar that it shall do any man's heart good to hear him ; " and this being objected to as improper, he still has a resource in his good opinion of himself, and " will roar you an 'twere any nightingale." Snug the Joiner is the moral man of the piece, who proceeds by measurement and discretion in all things. You see him with his rule and compasses in his hand. " Have you the lion's part written ? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study."—" You may do it extempore," says Quince, " for it is nothing but roaring." Starveling the Tailor keeps the peace, and objects to the lion and the drawn sword. " I believe we must leave the killing out when all's done." Starveling, however, does not start the objections himself, but seconds them when made by others, as if he had not spirit to express his fears without encouragement. It is too much to suppose all this intentional : but it very luckily falls out so. Nature

includes all that is implied in the most subtle analytical distinctions; and the same distinctions will be found in Shakespear. Bottom, who is not only chief actor, but stage-manager for the occasion, has a device to obviate the danger of frightening the ladies: "Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and for better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the Weaver: this will put them out of fear." Bottom seems to have understood the subject of dramatic illusion at least as well as any modern essayist. If our holiday mechanic rules the roast among his fellows, he is no less at home in his new character of an ass, "with amiable cheeks, and fair large ears." He instinctively acquires a most learned taste, and grows fastidious in the choice of dried peas and bottled hay. He is quite familiar with his new attendants, and assigns them their parts with all due gravity. "Monsieur Cobweb, good Monsieur, get your weapon in your hand, and kill me a red-hipt humble bee on the top of a thistle, and, good Monsieur, bring me the honey-bag." What an exact knowledge is here shewn of natural history!

Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, is the leader of the fairy band. He is the Ariel of the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM; and yet as unlike as can be to the Ariel in the *Tempest*. No other poet could have made two such different characters out of the same fanciful materials and situations. Ariel is a minister of retribution, who is touched with the sense of pity at the woes he inflicts. Puck is a mad-cap sprite, full of wantonness and mischief, who laughs at those whom he misleads—"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" Ariel cleaves the air, and executes his mission with the zeal of a winged messenger; Puck is borne along on his fairy errand like the light and glittering gossamer before the breeze. He is, indeed, a most Epicurean little gentleman, dealing in quaint devices, and faring in dainty delights. Prospero and his world of spirits are a set of moralists: but with Oberon and his fairies we are launched at once into the empire of the

butterflies. How beautifully is this race of beings contrasted with the men and women actors in the scene, by a single epithet which Titania gives to the latter, "the human mortals!" It is astonishing that Shakespear should be considered, not only by foreigners, but by many of our own critics, as a gloomy and heavy writer, who painted nothing but "gorgons and hydras, and chimeras dire." His subtlety exceeds that of all other dramatic writers, insomuch that a celebrated person of the present day said that he regarded him rather as a metaphysician than a poet. His delicacy and sportive gaiety are infinite. In the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM alone, we should imagine, there is more sweetness and beauty of description than in the whole range of French poetry put together. What we mean is this, that we will produce out of that single play ten passages, to which we do not think any ten passages in the works of the French poets can be opposed, displaying equal fancy and imagery. Shall we mention the remonstrance of Helena to Hermia, or Titania's description of her fairy train, or her disputes with Oberon about the Indian boy, or Puck's account of himself and his employments, or the Fairy Queen's exhortation to the elves to pay due attendance upon her favourite, Bottom; or Hippolita's description of a chace, or Theseus's answer? The two last are as heroical and spirited as the others are full of luscious tenderness. The reading of this play is like wandering in a grove by moonlight: the descriptions breathe a sweetness like odours thrown from beds of flowers.

Titania's exhortation to the fairies to wait upon Bottom, which is remarkable for a certain cloying sweetness in the repetition of the rhymes, is as follows:—

> "Be kind and courteous to this gentleman.
> Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes,
> Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
> With purple grapes, green figs and mulberries;
> The honey-bags steal from the humble bees,
> And for night tapers crop their waxen thighs,
> And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
> To have my love to bed, and to arise:

And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,
To fan the moon-beams from his sleeping eyes;
Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies."

The sounds of the lute and of the trumpet are not more distinct than the poetry of the foregoing passage, and of the conversation between Theseus and Hippolita.

"*Theseus.* Go, one of you, find out the forester,
For now our observation is perform'd;
And since we have the vaward of the day,
My love shall hear the music of my hounds.
Uncouple in the western valley, go,
Dispatch, I say, and find the forester.
We will, fair Queen, up to the mountain's top,
And mark the musical confusion
Of hounds and echo in conjunction.
Hippolita. I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear
With hounds of Sparta; never did I hear
Such gallant chiding. For besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seem'd all one mutual cry. I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.
Theseus. My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
So flew'd, so sanded, and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
Crook-knee'd and dew-lap'd, like Thessalian bulls,
Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,
Each under each. A cry more tuneable
Was never halloo'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly:
Judge when you hear."—

Even Titian never made a hunting-piece of a *gusto* so fresh and lusty, and so near the first ages of the world as this.—

It had been suggested to us, that the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM would do admirably to get up as a Christmas after-piece; and our prompter proposed that Mr. Kean should play the part of Bottom, as worthy of his great talents. He might, in the discharge of his duty, offer to play the lady like any of our actresses that he pleased, the lover or the tyrant like any of our actors that he pleased, and the lion like "the most fearful wild-fowl living." The carpenter, the tailor, and joiner, it was thought, would hit the galleries. The young ladies in

love would interest the side-boxes ; and Robin Goodfellow and his companions excite a lively fellow-feeling in the children from school. There would be two courts, an empire within an empire, the Athenian and the Fairy King and Queen, with their attendants, and with all their finery. What an opportunity for processions, for the sound of trumpets and glittering of spears! What a fluttering of urchins' painted wings ; what a delightful profusion of gauze clouds and airy spirits floating on them !

Alas the experiment has been tried, and has failed ; not through the fault of Mr. Kean, who did not play the part of Bottom, nor of Mr. Liston, who did, and who played it well, but from the nature of things. The MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, when acted, is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime. All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand ; but the spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled. —Poetry and the stage do not agree well together. The attempt to reconcile them in this instance fails not only of effect, but of decorum. The *ideal* can have no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective : every thing there is in the fore-ground. That which was merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality. Where all is left to the imagination (as is the case in reading) every circumstance, near or remote, has an equal chance of being kept in mind, and tells accordingly to the mixed impression of all that has been suggested. But the imagination cannot sufficiently qualify the actual impressions of the senses. Any offence given to the eye is not to be got rid of by explanation. Thus Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells : on the stage it is an ass's head, and nothing more ; certainly a very strange costume for a gentleman to appear in. Fancy cannot be embodied any more than a simile can be painted ; and it is as idle to attempt it as to personate *Wall* or *Moonshine*. Fairies are not incredible, but fairies six feet high are so. Monsters are not shocking, if they are seen at a proper distance. When ghosts appear at mid-day, when

apparitions stalk along Cheapside, then may the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM be represented without injury at Covent-garden or at Drury-lane. The boards of a theatre and the regions of fancy are not the same thing.

ROMEO AND JULIET

ROMEO AND JULIET is the only tragedy which Shakespear has written entirely on a love-story. It is supposed to have been his first play, and it deserves to stand in that proud rank. There is the buoyant spirit of youth in every line, in the rapturous intoxication of hope, and in the bitterness of despair. It has been said of ROMEO AND JULIET by a great critic, that "whatever is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous in the first opening of the rose, is to be found in this poem." The description is true ; and yet it does not answer to our idea of the play. For if it has the sweetness of the rose, it has its freshness too ; if it has the languor of the nightingale's song, it has also its giddy transport ; if it has the softness of a southern spring, it is as glowing and as bright. There is nothing of a sickly and sentimental cast. Romeo and Juliet are in love, but they are not love-sick. Every thing speaks the very soul of pleasure, the high and healthy pulse of the passions : the heart beats, the blood circulates and mantles throughout. Their courtship is not an insipid interchange of sentiments lip-deep, learnt at second-hand from poems and plays,—made up of beauties of the most shadowy kind, of "fancies wan that hang the pensive head," of evanescent smiles, and sighs that breathe not, of delicacy that shrinks from the touch, and feebleness that scarce supports itself, an elaborate vacuity of thought, and an artificial dearth of sense, spirit, truth, and nature ! It is the reverse of all this. It is Shakespear all over, and Shakespear when he was young.

We have heard it objected to ROMEO AND JULIET, that it is founded on an idle passion between a boy and a girl, who have scarcely seen and can have but little sympathy or rational esteem for one another, who have had no experience of the good or ills of life, and whose raptures or despair must be therefore equally groundless and fantastical. Whoever objects to the youth of the parties in this play as "too unripe and crude" to pluck the sweets of love, and wishes to see a first-love carried on into a good old age, and the passions taken at the rebound, when their force is spent, may find all this done in the *Stranger* and in other German plays, where they do things by contraries, and transpose nature to inspire sentiment and create philosophy. Shakespear proceeded in a more straightforward, and, we think, effectual way. He did not endeavour to extract beauty from wrinkles, or the wild throb of passion from the last expiring sigh of indifference. He did not "gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles." It was not his way. But he has given a picture of human life, such as it is in the order of nature. He has founded the passion of the two lovers not on the pleasures they had experienced, but on all the pleasures they had *not* experienced. All that was to come of life was theirs. At that untried source of promised happiness they slaked their thirst, and the first eager draught made them drunk with love and joy. They were in full possession of their senses and their affections. Their hopes were of air, their desires of fire. Youth is the season of love, because the heart is then first melted in tenderness from the touch of novelty, and kindled to rapture, for it knows no end of its enjoyments or its wishes. Desire has no limit but itself. Passion, the love and expectation of pleasure, is infinite, extravagant, inexhaustible, till experience comes to check and kill it. Juliet exclaims on her first interview with Romeo—

> "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep."

And why should it not? What was to hinder the thrilling tide of pleasure, which had just gushed from

her heart, from flowing on without stint or measure, but experience which she was yet without? What was to abate the transport of the first sweet sense of pleasure, which her heart and her senses had just tasted, but indifference which she was yet a stranger to? What was there to check the ardour of hope, of faith, of constancy, just rising in her breast, but disappointment which she had not yet felt? As are the desires and the hopes of youthful passion, such is the keenness of its disappointments, and their baleful effect. Such is the transition in this play from the highest bliss to the lowest despair, from the nuptial couch to an untimely grave. The only evil that even in apprehension befalls the two lovers is the loss of the greatest possible felicity; yet this loss is fatal to both, for they had rather part with life than bear the thought of surviving all that had made life dear to them. In all this, Shakespear has but followed nature, which existed in his time, as well as now. The modern philosophy, which reduces the whole theory of the mind to habitual impressions, and leaves the natural impulses of passion and imagination out of the account, had not then been discovered; or if it had, would have been little calculated for the uses of poetry.

It is the inadequacy of the same false system of philosophy to account for the strength of our earliest attachments, which has led Mr. Wordsworth to indulge in the mystical visions of Platonism in his Ode on the Progress of Life. He has very admirably described the vividness of our impressions in youth and childhood, and how "they fade by degrees into the light of common day," and he ascribes the change to the supposition of a pre-existent state, as if our early thoughts were nearer heaven, reflections of former trials of glory, shadows of our past being. This is idle. It is not from the knowledge of the past that the first impressions of things derive their gloss and splendour, but from our ignorance of the future, which fills the void to come with the warmth of our desires, with our gayest hopes, and brightest fancies. It is the obscurity spread before it that colours the prospect

of life with hope, as it is the cloud which reflects the rainbow. There is no occasion to resort to any mystical union and transmission of feeling through different states of being to account for the romantic enthusiasm of youth; nor to plant the root of hope in the grave, nor to derive it from the skies. Its root is in the heart of man: it lifts its head above the stars. Desire and imagination are inmates of the human breast. The heaven "that lies about us in our infancy" is only a new world, of which we know nothing but what we wish it to be, and believe all that we wish. In youth and boyhood, the world we live in is the world of desire, and of fancy: it is experience that brings us down to the world of reality. What is it that in youth sheds a dewy light round the evening star? That makes the daisy look so bright? That perfumes the hyacinth? That embalms the first kiss of love? It is the delight of novelty, and the seeing no end to the pleasure that we fondly believe is still in store for us. The heart revels in the luxury of its own thoughts, and is unable to sustain the weight of hope and love that presses upon it.—The effects of the passion of love alone might have dissipated Mr. Wordsworth's theory, if he means anything more by it than an ingenious and poetical allegory. *That* at least is not a link in the chain let down from other worlds; "the purple light of love" is not a dim reflection of the smiles of celestial bliss. It does not appear till the middle of life, and then seems like "another morn risen on mid-day." In this respect the soul comes into the world "in utter nakedness." Love waits for the ripening of the youthful blood. The sense of pleasure precedes the love of pleasure, but with the sense of pleasure, as soon as it is felt, come thronging infinite desires and hopes of pleasure, and love is mature as soon as born. It withers and it dies almost as soon!

This play presents a beautiful *coup-d'œil* of the progress of human life. In thought it occupies years, and embraces the circle of the affections from childhood to old age. Juliet has become a great girl, a young woman since we first remember her a little thing in the idle prattle of the

nurse. Lady Capulet was about her age when she became a mother, and old Capulet somewhat impatiently tells his younger visitors,

> ——— "I've seen the day,
> That I have worn a visor, and could tell
> A whispering tale in a fair lady's ear,
> Such as would please: 'tis gone, 'tis gone, 'tis gone."

Thus one period of life makes way for the following, and one generation pushes another off the stage. One of the most striking passages to shew the intense feeling of youth in this play is Capulet's invitation to Paris to visit his entertainment.

> "At my poor house, look to behold this night
> Earth-treading stars that make dark heav'n light;
> Such comfort as do lusty young men feel
> When well-apparel'd April on the heel
> Of limping winter treads, even such delight
> Among fresh female-buds shall you this night
> Inherit at my house."

The feelings of youth and of the spring are here blended together like the breath of opening flowers. Images of vernal beauty appear to have floated before the author's mind, in writing this poem, in profusion. Here is another of exquisite beauty, brought in more by accident than by necessity. Montague declares of his son smit with a hopeless passion, which he will not reveal—

> "But he, his own affection's counsellor,
> Is to himself so secret and so close,
> So far from sounding and discovery,
> As is the bud bit with an envious worm,
> Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
> Or dedicate his beauty to the sun."

This casual description is as full of passionate beauty as when Romeo dwells in frantic fondness on "the white wonder of his Juliet's hand." The reader may, if he pleases, contrast the exquisite pastoral simplicity of the above lines with the gorgeous description of Juliet when Romeo first sees her at her father's house, surrounded by company and artificial splendour.

> "What lady's that which doth enrich the hand
> Of yonder knight?

O she doth teach the torches to burn bright;
Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night,
Like a rich jewel in an Æthiop's ear."

It would be hard to say which of the two garden scenes is the finest, that where he first converses with his love, or takes leave of her the morning after their marriage. Both are like a heaven upon earth; the blissful bowers of Paradise let down upon this lower world. We will give only one passage of these well known scenes to shew the perfect refinement and delicacy of Shakespear's conception of the female character. It is wonderful how Collins, who was a critic and a poet of great sensibility, should have encouraged the common error on this subject by saying—"But stronger Shakespear felt for man alone."

The passage we mean is Juliet's apology for her maiden boldness.

"Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face;
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night.
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
What I have spoke—but farewel compliment:
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say, ay,
And I will take thee at thy word—Yet if thou swear'st,
Thou may'st prove false; at lovers' perjuries
They say Jove laughs. Oh gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
Or if thou think I am too quickly won,
I'll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo: but else not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond;
And therefore thou may'st think my 'haviour light;
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou over-heard'st, ere I was ware,
My true love's passion; therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered."

In this and all the rest, her heart, fluttering between pleasure, hope, and fear, seems to have dictated to her tongue, and "calls true love spoken simple modesty." Of the same sort, but bolder in virgin innocence, is her soliloquy after her marriage with Romeo.

"Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phœbus' mansion; such a waggoner
As Phaëton would whip you to the west,
And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night;
That run-aways' eyes may wink; and Romeo
Leap to these arms, untalked of, and unseen!——
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties: or if love be blind,
It best agrees with night.—Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods:
Hold my unmann'd blood bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold,
Thinks true love acted, simple modesty.
Come, night!—Come, Romeo! come, thou day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.——
Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo: and when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
That all the world shall be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.——
O, I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possess'd it; and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd: so tedious is this day,
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child, that hath new robes,
And may not wear them."

We the rather insert this passage here, inasmuch as we have no doubt it has been expunged from the Family Shakespear. Such critics do not perceive that the feelings of the heart sanctify, without disguising, the impulses of nature. Without refinement themselves, they confound modesty with hypocrisy. Not so the German critic, Schlegel. Speaking of ROMEO AND JULIET, he says, "It was reserved for Shakespear to unite purity of heart and the glow of imagination, sweetness and dignity of manners and passionate violence, in one ideal picture." The character is indeed one of perfect truth and sweetness. It has nothing forward, nothing coy, nothing affected or coquettish about it;—it is a pure effusion of nature. It is as frank as it is modest, for it has no thought that it wishes

to conceal. It reposes in conscious innocence on the strength of its affections. Its delicacy does not consist in coldness and reserve, but in combining warmth of imagination and tenderness of heart with the most voluptuous sensibility. Love is a gentle flame that rarifies and expands her whole being. What an idea of trembling haste and airy grace, borne upon the thoughts of love, does the Friar's exclamation give of her, as she approaches his cell to be married—

> "Here comes the lady. Oh, so light of foot
> Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint:
> A lover may bestride the gossamer,
> That idles in the wanton summer air,
> And yet not fall, so light is vanity."

The tragic part of this character is of a piece with the rest. It is the heroic founded on tenderness and delicacy. Of this kind are her resolution to follow the Friar's advice, and the conflict in her bosom between apprehension and love when she comes to take the sleeping poison. Shakspear is blamed for the mixture of low characters. If this is a deformity, it is the source of a thousand beauties. One instance is the contrast between the guileless simplicity of Juliet's attachment to her first love, and the convenient policy of the nurse in advising her to marry Paris, which excites such indignation in her mistress. "Ancient damnation! oh most wicked fiend," &c.

Romeo is Hamlet in love. There is the same rich exuberance of passion and sentiment in the one, that there is of thought and sentiment in the other. Both are absent and self-involved, both live out of themselves in a world of imagination. Hamlet is abstracted from every thing; Romeo is abstracted from every thing but his love, and lost in it. His "frail thoughts dally with faint surmise," and are fashioned out of the suggestions of hope, "the flatteries of sleep." He is himself only in his Juliet; she is his only reality, his heart's true home and idol. The rest of the world is to him a passing dream. How finely is this character pourtrayed where he recollects himself on seeing Paris slain at the tomb of Juliet!—

"What said my man when my betossed soul
Did not attend him as we rode? I think
He told me Paris should have married Juliet."

And again, just before he hears the sudden tidings of her death—

"If I may trust the flattery of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand;
My bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne,
And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.
I dreamt my lady came and found me dead,
(Strange dream! that gives a dead man leave to think)
And breath'd such life with kisses on my lips,
That I reviv'd and was an emperour.
Ah me! how sweet is love itself possess'd,
When but love's shadows are so rich in joy!"

Romeo's passion for Juliet is not a first love: it succeeds and drives out his passion for another mistress, Rosaline, as the sun hides the stars. This is perhaps an artifice (not absolutely necessary) to give us a higher opinion of the lady, while the first absolute surrender of her heart to him enhances the richness of the prize. The commencement, progress, and ending of his second passion are however complete in themselves, not injured if they are not bettered by the first. The outline of the play is taken from an Italian novel; but the dramatic arrangement of the different scenes between the lovers, the more than dramatic interest in the progress of the story, the developement of the characters with time and circumstances, just according to the degree and kind of interest excited, are not inferior to the expression of passion and nature. It has been ingeniously remarked among other proofs of skill in the contrivance of the fable, that the improbability of the main incident in the piece, the administering of the sleeping-potion, is softened and obviated from the beginning by the introduction of the Friar on his first appearance culling simples and descanting on their virtues. Of the passionate scenes in this tragedy, that between the Friar and Romeo when he is told of his sentence of banishment, that between Juliet and the Nurse when she hears of it, and of the death of her cousin Tybalt (which

bear no proportion in her mind, when passion after the first shock of surprise throws its weight into the scale of her affections) and the last scene at the tomb, are among the most natural and overpowering. In all of these it is not merely the force of any one passion that is given, but the slightest and most unlooked-for transitions from one to another, the mingling currents of every different feeling rising up and prevailing in turn, swayed by the master-mind of the poet, as the waves undulate beneath the gliding storm. Thus when Juliet has by her complaints encouraged the Nurse to say, "Shame come to Romeo," she instantly repels the wish, which she had herself occasioned, by answering—

> "Blister'd be thy tongue
> For such a wish! He was not born to shame.
> Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit,
> For 'tis a throne where honour may be crown'd
> Sole monarch of the universal earth!
> O, what a beast was I to chide him so?
> *Nurse.* Will you speak well of him that kill'd your cousin?
> *Juliet.* Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?
> Ah my poor lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,
> When I, thy three-hours' wife, have mangled it?"

And then follows on the neck of her remorse and returning fondness, that wish treading almost on the brink of impiety, but still held back by the strength of her devotion to her lord, that "father, mother, nay, or both were dead," rather than Romeo banished. If she requires any other excuse, it is in the manner in which Romeo echoes her frantic grief and disappointment in the next scene at being banished from her.—Perhaps one of the finest pieces of acting that ever was witnessed on the stage, is Mr. Kean's manner of doing this scene and his repetition of the word, *Banished*. He treads close indeed upon the genius of his author.

A passage which this celebrated actor and able commentator on Shakespear (actors are the best commentators on the poets) did not give with equal truth or force of feeling was the one which Romeo makes at the tomb of Juliet, before he drinks the poison.

———"Let me peruse this face—
Mercutio's kinsman! noble county Paris!
What said my man, when my betossed soul
Did not attend him as we rode! I think,
He told me, Paris should have married Juliet!
Said he not so? or did I dream it so?
Or am I mad, hearing him talk of Juliet,
To think it was so?——O, give me thy hand,
One writ with me in sour misfortune's book!
I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave——
For here lies Juliet.

* * * * * * *

———O, my love! my wife!
Death that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips, and in thy cheeks,
And Death's pale flag is not advanced there.——
Tybalt, ly'st thou there in thy bloody sheet?
O, what more favour can I do to thee,
Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain,
To sunder his that was thine enemy?
Forgive me, cousin! Ah, dear Juliet,
Why art thou yet so fair! Shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous;
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour!
For fear of that, I will stay still with thee;
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again: here, here will I remain
With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest;
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.—Eyes, look your last!
Arms, take your last embrace! and lips, O you,
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death!——
Come, bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide!
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rock my sea-sick weary bark!
Here's to my love!—[*Drinks.*] O, true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick.—Thus with a kiss I die."

The lines in this speech, describing the loveliness of Juliet, who is supposed to be dead, have been compared to those in which it is said of Cleopatra after her death, that she looked "as she would take another Antony in her strong toil of grace;" and a question has been started

which is the finest, that we do not pretend to decide. We can more easily decide between Shakespear and any other author, than between him and himself.—Shall we quote any more passages to shew his genius or the beauty of ROMEO AND JULIET? At that rate, we might quote the whole. The late Mr. Sheridan, on being shewn a volume of the Beauties of Shakespear, very properly asked—"But where are the other eleven?" The character of Mercutio in this play is one of the most mercurial and spirited of the productions of Shakespear's comic muse.

LEAR

WE wish that we could pass this play over, and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall far short of the subject; or even of what we ourselves conceive of it. To attempt to give a description of the play itself or of its effect upon the mind, is mere impertinence: yet we must say something.—It is then the best of all Shakespear's plays, for it is the one in which he was most in earnest. He was here fairly caught in the web of his own imagination. The passion which he has taken as his subject is that which strikes its root deepest into the human heart; of which the bond is the hardest to be unloosed; and the cancelling and tearing to pieces of which gives the greatest revulsion to the frame. This depth of nature, this force of passion, this tug and war of the elements of our being, this firm faith in filial piety, and the giddy anarchy and whirling tumult of the thoughts at finding this prop failing it, the contrast between the fixed, immoveable basis of natural affection, and the rapid, irregular starts of imagination, suddenly wrenched from all its accustomed holds and resting-places in the soul, this is what Shakespear has given, and what nobody else but he could give. So we believe.—The mind of Lear, staggering between the weight of attach-

ment and the hurried movements of passion, is like a tall ship driven about by the winds, buffetted by the furious waves, but that still rides above the storm, having its anchor fixed in the bottom of the sea; or it is like the sharp rock circled by the eddying whirlpool that foams and beats against it, or like the solid promontory pushed from its basis by the force of an earthquake.

The character of Lear itself is very finely conceived for the purpose. It is the only ground on which such a story could be built with the greatest truth and effect. It is his rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him. The part which Cordelia bears in the scene is extremely beautiful: the story is almost told in the first words she utters. We see at once the precipice on which the poor old king stands from his own extravagant and credulous importunity, the indiscreet simplicity of her love (which, to be sure, has a little of her father's obstinacy in it) and the hollowness of her sister's pretensions. Almost the first burst of that noble tide of passion, which runs through the play, is in the remonstrance of Kent to his royal master on the injustice of his sentence against his youngest daughter—"Be Kent unmannerly, when Lear is mad!" This manly plainness, which draws down on him the displeasure of the unadvised king, is worthy of the fidelity with which he adheres to his fallen fortunes. The true character of the two eldest daughters, Regan and Gonerill (they are so thoroughly hateful that we do not even like to repeat their names) breaks out in their answer to Cordelia who desires them to treat their father well—"Prescribe not us our duties"—their hatred of advice being in proportion to their determination to do wrong, and to their hypocritical pretensions to do right. Their deliberate hypocrisy adds the last finishing to the odiousness of their characters. It is the absence of this detestable quality that is the only relief in the character of Edmund the Bastard, and that at times reconciles us

to him. We are not tempted to exaggerate the guilt of his conduct, when he himself gives it up as a bad business, and writes himself down "plain villain." Nothing more can be said about it. His religious honesty in this respect is admirable. One speech of his is worth a million. His father, Gloster, whom he has just deluded with a forged story of his brother Edgar's designs against his life, accounts for his unnatural behaviour and the strange depravity of the times from the late eclipses in the sun and moon. Edmund, who is in the secret, says when he is gone—"This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune (often the surfeits of our own behaviour) we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars: as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treacherous by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whore-master man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's tail, and my nativity was under Ursa Major: so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. Tut! I should have been what I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardising."—The whole character, its careless, light-hearted villainy, contrasted with the sullen, rancorous malignity of Regan and Gonerill, its connection with the conduct of the under-plot, in which Gloster's persecution of one of his sons and the ingratitude of another, form a counterpart to the mistakes and misfortunes of Lear,—his double amour with the two sisters, and the share which he has in bringing about the fatal catastrophe, are all managed with an uncommon degree of skill and power.

It has been said, and we think justly, that the third act of *Othello* and the three first acts of LEAR, are Shakespear's great master-pieces in the logic of passion: that they contain the highest examples not only of the force of individual passion, but of its dramatic vicissitudes and

striking effects arising from the different circumstances and characters of the persons speaking. We see the ebb and flow of the feeling, its pauses and feverish starts, its impatience of opposition, its accumulating force when it has time to recollect itself, the manner in which it avails itself of every passing word or gesture, its haste to repel insinuation, the alternate contraction and dilatation of the soul, and all "the dazzling fence of controversy" in this mortal combat with poisoned weapons, aimed at the heart, where each wound is fatal. We have seen in *Othello*, how the unsuspecting frankness and impetuous passions of the Moor are played upon and exasperated by the artful dexterity of Iago. In the present play, that which aggravates the sense of sympathy in the reader, and of uncontroulable anguish in the swoln heart of Lear, is the petrifying indifference, the cold, calculating, obdurate selfishness of his daughters. His keen passions seem whetted on their stony hearts. The contrast would be too painful, the shock too great, but for the intervention of the Fool, whose well-timed levity comes in to break the continuity of feeling when it can no longer be borne, and to bring into play again the fibres of the heart just as they are growing rigid from over-strained excitement. The imagination is glad to take refuge in the half-comic, half-serious comments of the Fool, just as the mind under the extreme anguish of a surgical operation vents itself in sallies of wit. The character was also a grotesque ornament of the barbarous times, in which alone the tragic ground-work of the story could be laid. In another point of view it is indispensable, inasmuch as while it is a diversion to the too great intensity of our disgust, it carries the pathos to the highest pitch of which it is capable, by shewing the pitiable weakness of the old king's conduct and its irretrievable consequences in the most familiar point of view. Lear may well "beat at the gate which let his folly in," after, as the Fool says, "he has made his daughters his mothers." The character is dropped in the third act to make room for the entrance of Edgar as Mad Tom, which well accords with the increasing bustle and wildness

of the incidents ; and nothing can be more complete than the distinction between Lear's real and Edgar's assumed madness, while the resemblance in the cause of their distresses, from the severing of the nearest ties of natural affection, keeps up a unity of interest. Shakespear's mastery over his subject, if it was not art, was owing to a knowledge of the connecting links of the passions, and their effect upon the mind, still more wonderful than any systematic adherence to rules, and that anticipated and outdid all the efforts of the most refined art, not inspired and rendered instinctive by genius.

One of the most perfect displays of dramatic power is the first interview between Lear and his daughter, after the designed affronts upon him, which till one of his knights reminds him of them, his sanguine temperament had led him to overlook. He returns with his train from hunting, and his usual impatience breaks out in his first words, "Let me not stay a jot for dinner ; go, get it ready." He then encounters the faithful Kent in disguise, and retains him in his service ; and the first trial of his honest duty is to trip up the heels of the officious Steward who makes so prominent and despicable a figure through the piece. On the entrance of Gonerill the following dialogue takes place :—

"*Lear.* How now, daughter ? what makes that frontlet on ? Methinks, you are too much of late i' the frown.

Fool. Thou wast a pretty fellow, when thou had'st no need to care for her frowning ; now thou art an O without a figure : I am better than thou art now ; I am a fool, thou art nothing.——Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue ; [*To Gonerill*] so your face bids me, though you say nothing. Mum, mum.

He that keeps nor crust nor crum,
Weary of all, shall want some.——

That's a sheal'd peascod ! [*Pointing to Lear.*

Gonerill. Not only, sir, this your all-licens'd fool,
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourly carp and quarrel ; breaking forth
In rank and not-to-be-endured riots.
I had thought, by making this well known unto you,
To have found a safe redress ; but now grow fearful,
By what yourself too late have spoke and done,
That you protect this course, and put it on

By your allowance ; which if you should, the fault
Would not 'scape censure, nor the redresses sleep,
Which in the tender of a wholesome weal,
Might in their working do you that offence,
(Which else were shame) that then necessity
Would call discreet proceeding.

Fool. For you trow, nuncle,

The hedge sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
That it had its head bit off by its young.

So out went the candle, and we were left darkling.

Lear. Are you our daughter ?

Gonerill. Come, sir,
I would, you would make use of that good wisdom
Whereof I know you are fraught ; and put away
These dispositions, which of late transform you
From what you rightly are.

Fool. May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse ?
——Whoop, Jug, I love thee.

Lear. Does any here know me ?—Why, this is not Lear :
Does Lear walk thus ? speak thus ?—Where are his eyes ?
Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
Are lethargy'd——Ha ! waking ?—'Tis not so.——
Who is it that can tell me who I am ?—Lear's shadow ?
I would learn that : for by the marks
Of sov'reignty, of knowledge, and of reason,
I should be false persuaded I had daughters.——
Your name, fair gentlewoman ?

Gonerill. Come, sir :
This admiration is much o' the favour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
To understand my purposes aright :
As you are old and reverend, you should be wise :
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires ;
Men so disorder'd, so debauch'd, and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shews like a riotous inn : epicurism and lust
Make it more like a tavern, or a brothel,
Than a grac'd palace. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy : be then desir'd
By her, that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train ;
And the remainder, that shall still depend,
To be such men as may besort your age,
And know themselves and you.

Lear. Darkness and devils ! ——
Saddle my horses ; call my train together.——
Degenerate bastard ! I'll not trouble thee ;
Yet have I left a daughter.

Gonerill. You strike my people; and your disorder'd rabble
Make servants of their betters.

Enter ALBANY.

Lear. Woe, that too late repents—O, sir, are you come?
Is it your will? speak, sir.—Prepare my horses.——
[*To Albany.*
Ingratitude! thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous, when thou shew'st thee in a child,
Than the sea-monster!
Albany. Pray, sir, be patient.
Lear. Detested kite! thou liest. [*To Gonerill.*
My train are men of choice and rarest parts,
That all particulars of duty know;
And in the most exact regard support
The worships of their name.——O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia shew!
Which, like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature
From the fixt place; drew from my heart all love,
And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at the gate, that let thy folly in, [*Striking his head.*
And thy dear judgment out!——Go, go, my people!
Albany. My lord, I am guiltless, as I am ignorant
Of what hath mov'd you.
Lear. It may be so, my lord——
Hear, nature, hear! dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility;
Dry up in her the organs of increase;
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen: that it may live,
To be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks;
Turn all her mother's pains, and benefits,
To laughter and contempt; that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!——Away, away! [*Exit.*
Albany. Now, gods, that we adore, whereof comes this?
Gonerill. Never afflict yourself to know the cause;
But let his disposition have that scope
That dotage gives it.

Re-enter LEAR.

Lear. What, fifty of my followers at a clap!
Within a fortnight!
Albany. What's the matter, sir?

Lear. I'll tell thee; life and death! I am asham'd
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus:
[*To Gonerill.*
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them.——Blasts and fogs upon thee!
The untented woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee!——Old fond eyes
Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck you out;
And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
To temper clay.——Ha! is it come to this?
Let it be so:——Yet have I left a daughter,
Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable;
When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flea thy wolfish visage. Thou shalt find,
That I'll resume the shape, which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever.
[*Exeunt Lear, Kent, and Attendants.*"

This is certainly fine: no wonder that Lear says after it, "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heavens," feeling its effects by anticipation; but fine as is this burst of rage and indignation at the first blow aimed at his hopes and expectations, it is nothing near so fine as what follows from his double disappointment, and his lingering efforts to see which of them he shall lean upon for support and find comfort in, when both his daughters turn against his age and weakness. It is with some difficulty that Lear gets to speak with his daughter Regan, and her husband, at Gloster's castle. In concert with Gonerill they have left their own home on purpose to avoid him. His apprehensions are first alarmed by this circumstance, and when Gloster, whose guests they are, urges the fiery temper of the Duke of Cornwall as an excuse for not importuning him a second time, Lear breaks out—

"Vengeance! Plague! Death! Confusion!——
Fiery? What quality? Why, Gloster, Gloster,
I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall, and his wife."

Afterwards, feeling perhaps not well himself, he is inclined to admit their excuse from illness, but then recollecting that they have set his messenger (Kent) in the stocks, all his suspicions are roused again, and he insists on seeing them.

"*Enter* CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOSTER, *and Servants.*

Lear. Good-morrow to you both.
Cornwall. Hail to your grace! [*Kent is set at liberty.*
Regan. I am glad to see your highness.
Lear. Regan, I think you are; I know what reason
I have to think so: if thou should'st not be glad,
I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
Sepulch'ring an adultress.——O, are you free?
[*To Kent.*
Some other time for that.——Beloved Regan,
Thy sister's naught: O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here——
[*Points to his heart.*
I can scarce speak to thee; thou'lt not believe,
Of how deprav'd a quality——O Regan!
Regan. I pray you, sir, take patience; I have hope
You less know how to value her desert,
Than she to scant her duty.
Lear. Say, how is that?
Regan. I cannot think my sister in the least
Would fail her obligation; if, sir, perchance,
She have restrain'd the riots of your followers,
'Tis on such ground, and to such wholesome end,
As clears her from all blame.
Lear. My curses on her!
Regan. O, sir, you are old;
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine: you should be rul'd, and led
By some discretion, that discerns your state
Better than yourself: therefore, I pray you,
That to our sister you do make return;
Say, you have wrong'd her, sir.
Lear. Ask her forgiveness?
Do you but mark how this becomes the use?
Dear daughter, I confess that I am old;
Age is unnecessary; on my knees I beg,
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.
Regan. Good sir, no more; these are unsightly tricks:
Return you to my sister.
Lear. Never, Regan:
She hath abated me of half my train;
Look'd blank upon me; struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart:——
All the stor'd vengeances of heaven fall
On her ungrateful top! Strike her young bones,
You taking airs, with lameness!
Cornwall. Fie, sir, fie!
Lear. You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames

Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-suck'd fogs, drawn by the powerful sun,
To fall, and blast her pride!
Regan. O the blest gods!
So will you wish on me, when the rash mood is on.
Lear. No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse;
Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness; her eyes are fierce, but thine
Do comfort, and not burn: 'Tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
And, in conclusion, to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in: thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude;
Thy half o' the kingdom thou hast not forgot,
Wherein I thee endow'd.
Regan. Good sir, to the purpose. [*Trumpets within.*
Lear. Who put my man i' the stocks?
Cornwall. What trumpet's that?

Enter Steward.

Regan. I know't, my sister's: this approves her letter,
That she would soon be here.—Is your lady come?
Lear. This is a slave, whose easy-borrow'd pride
Dwells in the fickle grace of her he follows:——
Out, Varlet, from my sight!
Cornwall. What means your grace?
Lear. Who stock'd my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou did'st not know on't.——Who comes here? O heavens,

Enter Gonerill.

If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause; send down, and take my part!—
Art not asham'd to look upon this beard?— [*To Gonerill.*
O, Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?
Gonerill. Why not by the hand, sir? How have I offended?
All's not offence, that indiscretion finds,
And dotage terms so.
Lear. O, sides, you are too tough!
Will you yet hold?—How came my man i' the stocks?
Cornwall. I set him there, sir: but his own disorders
Deserv'd much less advancement.
Lear. You! did you?
Regan. I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If, till the expiration of your month,
You will return and sojourn with my sister,
Dismissing half your train, come then to me;

I am now from home, and out of that provision
Which shall be needful for your entertainment.
Lear. Return to her, and fifty men dismiss'd?
No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl——
To wage against the enmity o' the air,
Necessity's sharp pinch!——Return with her!
Why, the hot-blooded France, that dowerless took
Our youngest born, I could as well be brought
To knee his throne, and squire-like pension beg
To keep base life afoot.——Return with her!
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter
To this detested groom. [*Looking on the Steward.*

Gonerill. At your choice, sir.

Lear. Now, I pr'ythee, daughter, do not make me mad;
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell:
We'll no more meet, no more see one another:——
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
Or, rather, a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine: thou art a bile,
A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle,
In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee;
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it:
I did not bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove:
Mend when thou canst; be better, at thy leisure:
I can be patient; I can stay with Regan,
I, and my hundred knights.

Regan. Not altogether so, sir;
I look'd not for you yet, nor am provided
For your fit welcome: Give ear, sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion
Must be content to think you old, and so——
But she knows what she does.

Lear. Is this well spoken now?

Regan. I dare avouch it, sir: What, fifty followers?
Is it not well? What should you need of more?
Yea, or so many? Sith that both charge and danger
Speak 'gainst so great a number? How, in one house,
Should many people, under two commands,
Hold amity? 'Tis hard; almost impossible.

Gonerill. Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
From those that she calls servants, or from mine?

Regan. Why not, my lord? If then they chanc'd to slack you,
We would controul them: if you will come to me
(For now I spy a danger) I entreat you
To bring but five-and-twenty; to no more
Will I give place, or notice.

Lear. I gave you all——
Regan. And in good time you gave it.
Lear. Made you my guardians, my depositaries;
But kept a reservation to be follow'd
With such a number: what, must I come to you
With five-and-twenty, Regan! said you so?
Regan. And speak it again, my lord: no more with me.
Lear. Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favour'd,
When others are more wicked; not being the worst,
Stands in some rank of praise:——I'll go with thee;
[*To Gonerill.*
Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,
And thou art twice her love.
Gonerill. Hear me, my lord;
What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,
To follow in a house, where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?
Regan. What need one?
Lear. O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's: thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st;
Which scarcely keeps thee warm.——But, for true need——
You heavens, give me that patience which I need!
You see me here, you gods; a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger!
O, let no woman's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks!——No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both,
That all the world shall——I will do such things——
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. You think, I'll weep:
No, I'll not weep:——
I have full cause of weeping; but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
Or e'er I'll weep:——O, fool, I shall go mad!——
[*Exeunt Lear, Gloster, Kent, and Fool.*"

If there is any thing in any author like this yearning of the heart, these throes of tenderness, this profound expression of all that can be thought and felt in the most heart-rending situations, we are glad of it; but it is in some author that we have not read.

The scene in the storm, where he is exposed to all the fury of the elements, though grand and terrible, is not so fine, but the moralising scenes with Mad Tom, Kent, and Gloster, are upon a par with the former. His exclamation in the supposed trial-scene of his daughters, "See the little dogs and all, Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart; see, they bark at me," his issuing his orders, "Let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart," and his reflection when he sees the misery of Edgar, "Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this," are in a style of pathos, where the extremest resources of the imagination are called in to lay open the deepest movements of the heart, which was peculiar to Shakespear. In the same style and spirit is his interrupting the Fool who asks "whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman," by answering "A king, a king."—

The indirect part that Gloster takes in these scenes where his generosity leads him to relieve Lear and resent the cruelty of his daughters, at the very time that he is himself instigated to seek the life of his son, and suffering under the sting of his supposed ingratitude, is a striking accompaniment to the situation of Lear. Indeed, the manner in which the threads of the story are woven together is almost as wonderful in the way of art as the carrying on the tide of passion, still varying and unimpaired, is on the score of nature. Among the remarkable instances of this kind are Edgar's meeting with his old blind father; the deception he practises upon him when he pretends to lead him to the top of Dover-cliff—"Come on, sir, here's the place," to prevent his ending his life and miseries together; his encounter with the perfidious Steward whom he kills, and his finding the letter from Gonerill to his brother upon him which leads to the final catastrophe, and brings the wheel of Justice "full circle home" to the guilty parties. The bustle and rapid succession of events in the last scenes is surprising. But the meeting between Lear and Cordelia is by far the most affecting part of them. It has all the wildness of poetry, and all the heart-felt truth of nature. The previous

account of her reception of the news of this unkind treatment, her involuntary reproaches to her sisters, "Shame, ladies, shame," Lear's backwardness to see his daughter, the picture of the desolate state to which he is reduced, "Alack, 'tis he; why he was met even now, as mad as the vex'd sea, singing aloud," only prepare the way for and heighten our expectation of what follows, and assuredly this expectation is not disappointed when through the tender care of Cordelia he revives and recollects her.

"*Cordelia.* How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty!
Lear. You do me wrong, to take me out o' the grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.
Cordelia. Sir, do you know me?
Lear. You are a spirit I know: when did you die?
Cordelia. Still, still, far wide!
Physician. He's scarce awake; let him alone awhile.
Lear. Where have I been? Where am I?—Fair daylight?——
I am mightily abus'd.—I should even die with pity,
To see another thus.—I know not what to say.——
I will not swear these are my hands:—let's see;
I feel this pin prick. 'Would I were assured
Of my condition.
Cordelia. O, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:——
No, sir, you must not kneel.
Lear. Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourscore and upward; and, to deal plainly,
I fear, I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks, I shou'd know you, and know this man;
Yet I am doubtful: for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night: do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.
Cordelia. And so I am, I am!"

Almost equal to this in awful beauty is their consolation of each other when, after the triumph of their enemies, they are led to prison.

"*Cordelia.* We are not the first,
Who, with best meaning, have incurr'd the worst.

For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;
Myself could else out-frown false fortune's frown.—
Shall we not see these daughters, and these sisters?
Lear. No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too—
Who loses, and who wins; who's in, who's out;—
And take upon us the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by the moon.
Edmund. Take them away.
Lear. Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense."

The concluding events are sad, painfully sad; but their pathos is extreme. The expression of the feelings is relieved by the very interest we take in the misfortunes of others, and by the reflections to which they give birth. Cordelia is hanged in prison by the orders of the bastard Edmund, which are known too late to be countermanded, and Lear dies broken-hearted, lamenting over her.

"*Lear.* And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life:
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? O, thou wilt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!——
Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir."

He dies, and indeed we feel the truth of what Kent says on the occasion—

"Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates him,
That would upon the rack of this rough world
Stretch him out longer."

Yet a happy ending has been contrived for this play, which is approved of by Dr. Johnson and condemned by Schlegel. A better authority than either, on any subject in which poetry and feeling are concerned, has given it in favour of Shakespear, in some remarks on the acting of Lear, with which we shall conclude this account.

"The LEAR of Shakespear cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery with which they mimic the storm

which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements than any actor can be to represent Lear. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual; the explosions of his passions are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that rich sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear;—we are in his mind; we are sustained by a grandeur, which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodised from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will on the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks or tones to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of *the heavens themselves*, when in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that 'they themselves are old!' What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things? But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it shew: it is too hard and stony: it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter, she must shine as a lover too. Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw it about more easily. A happy ending!—as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through,—the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this pudder and preparation—why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station,—as if at

his years and with his experience, anything was left but to die."[1]

Four things have struck us in reading LEAR:

1. That poetry is an interesting study, for this reason, that it relates to whatever is most interesting in human life. Whoever therefore has a contempt for poetry, has a contempt for himself and humanity.

2. That the language of poetry is superior to the language of painting; because the strongest of our recollections relate to feelings, not to faces.

3. That the greatest strength of genius is shewn in describing the strongest passions: for the power of the imagination, in works of invention, must be in proportion to the force of the natural impressions, which are the subject of them.

4. That the circumstance which balances the pleasure against the pain in tragedy is, that in proportion to the greatness of the evil, is our sense and desire of the opposite good excited; and that our sympathy with actual suffering is lost in the strong impulse given to natural affections, and carried away with the swelling tide of passion, that gushes from and relieves the heart.

RICHARD II.

RICHARD II. is a play little known compared with *Richard III.* which last is a play that every unfledged candidate for theatrical fame chuses to strut and fret his hour upon the stage in; yet we confess that we prefer the nature and feeling of the one to the noise and bustle of the other; at least, as we are so often forced to see it acted. In RICHARD II. the weakness of the king leaves us leisure to take a greater interest in the misfortunes of the man. After the first act, in which the arbitrariness of

[1] See an article, called *Theatralia*, in the second volume of the *Reflector*, by Charles Lamb.

his behaviour only proves his want of resolution, we see him staggering under the unlooked-for blows of fortune, bewailing his loss of kingly power, not preventing it, sinking under the aspiring genius of Bolingbroke, his authority trampled on, his hopes failing him, and his pride crushed and broken down under insults and injuries, which his own misconduct had provoked, but which he has not courage or manliness to resent. The change of tone and behaviour in the two competitors for the throne according to their change of fortune, from the capricious sentence of banishment passed by Richard upon Bolingbroke, the suppliant offers and modest pretensions of the latter on his return to the high and haughty tone with which he accepts Richard's resignation of the crown after the loss of all his power, the use which he makes of the deposed king to grace his triumphal progress through the streets of London, and the final intimation of his wish for his death, which immediately finds a servile executioner, is marked throughout with complete effect and without the slightest appearance of effort. The steps by which Bolingbroke mounts the throne are those by which Richard sinks into the grave. We feel neither respect nor love for the deposed monarch ; for he is as wanting in energy as in principle : but we pity him, for he pities himself. His heart is by no means hardened against himself, but bleeds afresh at every new stroke of mischance, and his sensibility, absorbed in his own person, and unused to misfortune, is not only tenderly alive to its own sufferings, but without the fortitude to bear them. He is, however, human in his distresses ; for to feel pain, and sorrow, weakness, disappointment, remorse and anguish, is the lot of humanity, and we sympathize with him accordingly. The sufferings of the man make us forget that he ever was a king.

The right assumed by sovereign power to trifle at its will with the happiness of others as a matter of course, or to remit its exercise as a matter of favour, is strikingly shewn in the sentence of banishment so unjustly pronounced on Bolingbroke and Mowbray, and in what

Bolingbroke says when four years of his banishment are taken off, with as little reason.

> "How long a time lies in one little word!
> Four lagging winters and four wanton springs
> End in a word: such is the breath of kings."

A more affecting image of the loneliness of a state of exile can hardly be given than by what Bolingbroke afterwards observes of his having "sighed his English breath in foreign clouds;" or than that conveyed in Mowbray's complaint at being banished for life.

> "The language I have learned these forty years,
> My native English, now I must forego;
> And now my tongue's use is to me no more
> Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
> Or like a cunning instrument cas'd up,
> Or being open, put into his hands
> That knows no touch to tune the harmony.
> I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,
> Too far in years to be a pupil now."—

How very beautiful is all this, and at the same time how very *English* too!

Richard II. may be considered as the first of that series of English historical plays, in which "is hung armour of the invincible knights of old," in which their hearts seem to strike against their coats of mail, where their blood tingles for the fight, and words are but the harbingers of blows. Of this state of accomplished barbarism the appeal of Bolingbroke and Mowbray is an admirable specimen. Another of these "keen encounters of their wits," which serve to whet the talkers' swords, is where Aumerle answers in the presence of Bolingbroke to the charge which Bagot brings against him of being an accessory in Gloster's death.

> "*Fitzwater.* If that thy valour stand on sympathies,
> There is my gage, Aumerle, in gage to thine;
> By that fair sun that shows me where thou stand'st,
> I heard thee say, and vauntingly thou spak'st it,
> That thou wert cause of noble Gloster's death.
> If thou deny'st it twenty times thou liest,
> And I will turn thy falsehood to thy heart
> Where it was forged, with my rapier's point.

Aumerle. Thou dar'st not, coward, live to see the day.
Fitzwater. Now, by my soul, I would it were this hour.
Aumerle. Fitzwater, thou art damn'd to hell for this.
Percy. Aumerle, thou liest; his honour is as true,
In this appeal, as thou art all unjust;
And that thou art so, there I throw my gage
To prove it on thee, to the extremest point
Of mortal breathing. Seize it, if thou dar'st.
Aumerle. And if I do not, may my hands rot off,
And never brandish more revengeful steel
Over the glittering helmet of my foe.
Who sets me else? By heav'n I'll throw at all.
I have a thousand spirits in my breast,
To answer twenty thousand such as you.
Surry. My Lord Fitzwater, I remember well
The very time Aumerle and you did talk.
Fitzwater. My lord, 'tis true: you were in presence then:
And you can witness with me this is true.
Surry. As false, by heav'n, as heav'n itself is true.
Fitzwater. Surry, thou liest.
Surry. Dishonourable boy,
That lie shall lye so heavy on my sword,
That it shall render vengeance and revenge,
Till thou the lie-giver and that lie rest
In earth as quiet as thy father's skull.
In proof whereof, there is mine honour's pawn:
Engage it to the trial, if thou dar'st.
Fitzwater. How fondly dost thou spur a forward horse:
If I dare eat or drink, or breathe or live,
I dare meet Surry in a wilderness,
And spit upon him, whilst I say he lies,
And lies, and lies: there is my bond of faith,
To tie thee to thy strong correction.
As I do hope to thrive in this new world,
Aumerle is guilty of my true appeal."

The truth is, that there is neither truth nor honour in all these noble persons: they answer words with words, as they do blows with blows, in mere self defence: nor have they any principle whatever but that of courage in maintaining any wrong they dare commit, or any falsehood which they find it useful to assert. How different were these noble knights and "barons bold" from their more refined descendants in the present day, who, instead of deciding questions of right by brute force, refer every thing to convenience, fashion, and good breeding! In

point of any abstract love of truth or justice, they are just the same now that they were then.

The characters of old John of Gaunt and of his brother York, uncles to the King, the one stern and foreboding, the other honest, good-natured, doing all for the best, and therefore doing nothing, are well kept up. The speech of the former, in praise of England, is one of the most eloquent that ever was penned. We should perhaps hardly be disposed to feed the pampered egotism of our countrymen by quoting this description, were it not that the conclusion of it (which looks prophetic) may qualify any improper degree of exultation.

"This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle,
This earth of Majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-Paradise,
This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house
Against the envy of less happy lands:
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd for their breed and famous for their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
(For Christian service and true chivalry)
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son;
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world,
Is now leas'd out (I die pronouncing it)
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
England bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious surge
Of wat'ry Neptune, is bound in with shame,
With inky-blots and rotten parchment bonds.
That England that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself."

The character of Bolingbroke, afterwards Henry IV. is drawn with a masterly hand:—patient for occasion, and then steadily availing himself of it, seeing his advantage afar off, but only seizing on it when he has it within his reach, humble, crafty, bold, and aspiring, encroaching by

regular but slow degrees, building power on opinion, and cementing opinion by power. His disposition is first unfolded by Richard himself, who however is too self-willed and secure to make a proper use of his knowledge.

> "Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green,
> Observed his courtship of the common people :
> How he did seem to dive into their hearts,
> With humble and familiar courtesy,
> What reverence he did throw away on slaves ;
> Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles,
> And patient under-bearing of his fortune.
> As 'twere to banish their affections with him.
> Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench ;
> A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,
> And had the tribute of his supple knee,
> With 'thanks my countrymen, my loving friends' ;
> As were our England in reversion his,
> And he our subjects' next degree in hope."

Afterwards, he gives his own character to Percy, in these words :

> "I thank thee, gentle Percy, and be sure
> I count myself in nothing else so happy,
> As in a soul rememb'ring my good friends ;
> And as my fortune ripens with thy love,
> It shall be still thy true love's recompense."

We know how he afterwards kept his promise. His bold assertion of his own rights, his pretended submission to the king, and the ascendancy which he tacitly assumes over him without openly claiming it, as soon as he has him in his power, are characteristic traits of this ambitious and politic usurper. But the part of Richard himself gives the chief interest to the play. His folly, his vices, his misfortunes, his reluctance to part with the crown, his fear to keep it, his weak and womanish regrets, his starting tears, his fits of hectic passion, his smothered majesty, pass in succession before us, and make a picture as natural as it is affecting. Among the most striking touches of pathos are his wish "O that I were a mockery king of snow to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke," and the incident of the poor groom who comes to visit him in prison, and tells him how "it yearned his heart that Bolingbroke upon his coronation-day rode on Roan

Barbary." We shall have occasion to return hereafter to the character of Richard II. in speaking of Henry VI. There is only one passage more, the description of his entrance into London with Bolingbroke, which we should like to quote here, if it had not been so used and worn out, so thumbed and got by rote, so praised and painted; but its beauty surmounts all these considerations.

"*Duchess.* My lord, you told me you would tell the rest,
When weeping made you break the story off
Of our two cousins coming into London.
York. Where did I leave?
Duchess. At that sad stop, my lord,
Where rude misgovern'd hands, from window tops,
Threw dust and rubbish on king Richard's head.
York. Then, as I said, the duke, great Bolingbroke,
Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed,
Which his aspiring rider seem'd to know,
With slow, but stately pace, kept on his course,
While all tongues cried—God save thee, Bolingbroke!
You would have thought the very windows spake,
So many greedy looks of young and old
Through casements darted their desiring eyes
Upon his visage; and that all the walls,
With painted imag'ry, had said at once—
Jesu preserve thee! welcome, Bolingbroke!
Whilst he, from one side to the other turning,
Bare-headed, lower than his proud steed's neck,
Bespake them thus—I thank you, countrymen:
And thus still doing thus he pass'd along.
Duchess. Alas, poor Richard! where rides he the while?
York. As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
After a well-grac'd actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious:
Even so, or with much more contempt, men's eyes
Did scowl on Richard; no man cried God save him!
No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home:
But dust was thrown upon his sacred head!
Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off—
His face still combating with tears and smiles,
The badges of his grief and patience—
That had not God, for some strong purpose, steel'd
The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted,
And barbarism itself have pitied him."

HENRY IV.

IN TWO PARTS.

If Shakespear's fondness for the ludicrous sometimes led to faults in his tragedies (which was not often the case) he has made us amends by the character of Falstaff. This is perhaps the most substantial comic character that ever was invented. Sir John carries a most portly presence in the mind's eye; and in him, not to speak it profanely, "we behold the fulness of the spirit of wit and humour bodily." We are as well acquainted with his person as his mind, and his jokes come upon us with double force and relish from the quantity of flesh through which they make their way, as he shakes his fat sides with laughter, or "lards the lean earth as he walks along." Other comic characters seem, if we approach and handle them, to resolve themselves into air, "into thin air;" but this is embodied and palpable to the grossest apprehension: it lies "three fingers deep upon the ribs," it plays about the lungs and the diaphragm with all the force of animal enjoyment. His body is like a good estate to his mind, from which he receives rents and revenues of profit and pleasure in kind, according to its extent, and the richness of the soil. Wit is often a meagre substitute for pleasurable sensation; an effusion of spleen and petty spite at the comforts of others, from feeling none in itself. Falstaff's wit is an emanation of a fine constitution; an exuberance of good-humour and good-nature; an overflowing of his love of laughter and good-fellowship; a giving vent to his heart's ease, and over-contentment with himself and others. He would not be in character, if he were not so fat as he is; for there is the greatest keeping in the boundless luxury of his imagination and the pampered self-indulgence of his physical appetites. He manures and nourishes his mind with jests, as he does his body with sack and sugar. He carves out his jokes, as he would a capon or a haunch of venison, where there is *cut*

and come again ; and pours out upon them the oil of gladness. His tongue drops fatness, and in the chambers of his brain "it snows of meat and drink." He keeps up perpetual holiday and open house, and we live with him in a round of invitations to a rump and dozen.—Yet we are not to suppose that he was a mere sensualist. All this is as much in imagination as in reality. His sensuality does not engross and stupify his other faculties, but "ascends me into the brain, clears away all the dull, crude vapours that environ it, and makes it full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes." His imagination keeps up the ball after his senses have done with it. He seems to have even a greater enjoyment of the freedom from restraint, of good cheer, of his ease, of his vanity, in the ideal exaggerated description which he gives of them, than in fact. He never fails to enrich his discourse with allusions to eating and drinking, but we never see him at table. He carries his own larder about with him, and he is himself "a tun of man." His pulling out the bottle in the field of battle is a joke to shew his contempt for glory accompanied with danger, his systematic adherence to his Epicurean philosophy in the most trying circumstances. Again, such is his deliberate exaggeration of his own vices, that it does not seem quite certain whether the account of his hostess's bill, found in his pocket, with such an out-of-the-way charge for capons and sack with only one halfpenny-worth of bread, was not put there by himself as a trick to humour the jest upon his favourite propensities, and as a conscious caricature of himself. He is represented as a liar, a braggart, a coward, a glutton, &c., and yet we are not offended but delighted with him ; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself. He openly assumes all these characters to shew the humorous part of them. The unrestrained indulgence of his own ease, appetites, and convenience, has neither malice nor hypocrisy in it. In a word, he is an actor in himself almost as much as upon the stage, and we no more object to the character of Falstaff in a moral point of view than we should think of bringing an excellent comedian, who

should represent him to the life, before one offices. We only consider the number of plea in which he puts certain foibles (the more pleasant are opposed to the received rules and necessary rest of society) and do not trouble ourselves about the con- quences resulting from them, for no mischievous conse- quences do result. Sir John is old as well as fat, which gives a melancholy retrospective tinge to the character; and by the disparity between his inclinations and his capacity for enjoyment, makes it still more ludicrous and fantastical.

The secret of Falstaff's wit is for the most part a masterly presence of mind, an absolute self-possession, which nothing can disturb. His repartees are involuntary suggestions of his self-love; instinctive evasions of every thing that threatens to interrupt the career of his triumphant jollity and self-complacency. His very size floats him out of all his difficulties in a sea of rich conceits; and he turns round on the pivot of his convenience, with every occasion and at a moment's warning. His natural repugnance to every unpleasant thought or circumstance, of itself makes light of objections, and provokes the most extravagant and licentious answers in his own justification. His indifference to truth puts no check upon his invention, and the more improbable and unexpected his contrivances are, the more happily does he seem to be delivered of them, the anticipation of their effect acting as a stimulus to the gaiety of his fancy. The success of one adventurous sally gives him spirits to undertake another: he deals always in round numbers, and his exaggerations and excuses are "open, palpable, monstrous as the father that begets them." His dissolute carelessness of what he says discovers itself in the first dialogue with the Prince.

"*Falstaff.* By the lord, thou say'st true, lad; and is not mine hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?

P. Henry. As the honey of Hibla, my old lad of the castle; and is not a buff-jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?

Falstaff. How now, how now, mad wag, what in thy quips and thy quiddities? what a plague have I to do with a buff-jerkin?

P. Henry. Why, what a pox have I to do with mine hostess of the tavern?"

me scene he afterwards affects melancholy,
e satisfaction of heart, and professes reform,
it is the farthest thing in the world from his
ghts. He has no qualms of conscience, and there-
re would as soon talk of them as of any thing else when the humour takes him.

"*Falstaff.* But Hal, I pr'ythee trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought: an old lord of council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir; but I mark'd him not, and yet he talked very wisely, and in the street too.

P. Henry. Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the street, and no man regards it.

Falstaff. O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thus hast done much harm unto me, Hal; God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing, and now I am, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over, by the Lord; an I do not, I am a villain. I'll be damn'd for never a king's son in Christendom.

P. Henry. Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack?

Falstaff. Where thou wilt, lad, I'll make one; an I do not, call me villain, and baffle me.

P. Henry. I see good amendment of life in thee, from praying to purse-taking.

Falstaff. Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation."

Of the other prominent passages, his account of his pretended resistance to the robbers, "who grew from four men in buckram into eleven" as the imagination of his own valour increased with his relating it, his getting off when the truth is discovered by pretending he knew the Prince, the scene in which in the person of the old king he lectures the prince and gives himself a good character, the soliloquy on honour, and description of his new-raised recruits, his meeting with the Chief Justice, his abuse of the Prince and Poins, who overhear him, to Doll Tearsheet, his reconciliation with Mrs. Quickly who has arrested him for an old debt, and whom he persuades to pawn her plate to lend him ten pounds more, and the scenes with Shallow and Silence, are all inimitable. Of all of them, the scene in which Falstaff plays the part, first, of the

King, and then of Prince Henry, is the one that has been the most often quoted. We must quote it once more in illustration of our remarks.

"*Falstaff*. Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied: for though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son, I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion; but chiefly, a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me, here lies the point;——Why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher, and eat blackberries? A question not to be ask'd. Shall the son of England prove a thief, and take purses? a question not to be ask'd. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest: for, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears; not in pleasure, but in passion; not in words only, but in woes also:—and yet there is a virtuous man, whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

P. Henry. What manner of man, an it like your majesty?

Falstaff. A goodly portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r-lady, inclining to threescore; and now I do remember me, his name is Falstaff: if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If then the fruit may be known by the tree, as the tree by the fruit, then peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff: him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me, where hast thou been this month?

P. Henry. Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father.

Falstaff. Depose me? if thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker, or a poulterer's hare.

P. Henry. Well, here I am set.

Falstaff. And here I stand:—judge, my masters.

P. Henry. Now, Harry, whence come you?

Falstaff. My noble lord, from Eastcheap.

P. Henry The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.

Falstaff. S'blood, my lord, they are false:—nay, I'll tickle ye for a young prince, i'faith.

P. Henry. Swearest thou, ungracious boy? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace: there is a devil haunts thee, in the likeness of a fat old man; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoln parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuft cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manning-tree ox with the

pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villainy? wherein villainous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?

Falstaff. I would, your grace would take me with you; whom means your grace?

P. Henry. That villainous, abominable mis-leader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

Falstaff. My lord, the man I know.

P. Henry. I know thou dost.

Falstaff. But to say, I know more harm in him than in myself, were to say more than I know. That he is old (the more the pity) his white hairs do witness it: but that he is (saving your reverence) a whore-master, that I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! if to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned: if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins: but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company; banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.

P. Henry. I do, I will. [*Knocking; and Hostess and Bardolph go out.*

Re-enter Bardolph, *running.*

Bardolph. O, my lord, my lord: the sheriff with a most monstrous watch, is at the door.

Falstaff. Out, you rogue! play out the play: I have much to say in the behalf of that Falstaff."

One of the most characteristic descriptions of Sir John is that which Mrs. Quickly gives of him when he asks her "What is the gross sum that I owe thee?"

"*Hostess.* Marry, if thou wert an honest man, thyself, and the money too. Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire on Wednesday in Whitsun-week, when the prince broke thy head for likening his father to a singing man of Windsor; thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and to make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then, and call me gossip Quickly? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar; telling us, she had a good dish of prawns; whereby thou didst desire to eat some; whereby I told thee, they were ill for a green wound? And didst thou not, when she was gone down stairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people; saying, that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? I put thee now to thy book-oath; deny it, if thou canst."

This scene is to us the most convincing proof of Falstaff's power of gaining over the good will of those he was familiar with, except indeed Bardolph's somewhat profane exclamation on hearing the account of his death, "Would I were with him, wheresoe'er he is, whether in heaven or hell."

One of the topics of exulting superiority over others most common in Sir John's mouth is his corpulence and the exterior marks of good living which he carries about him, thus "turning his vices into commodity." He accounts for the friendship between the Prince and Poins, from "their legs being both of a bigness;" and compares Justice Shallow to "a man made after supper of a cheese-paring." There cannot be a more striking gradation of character than that between Falstaff and Shallow, and Shallow and Silence. It seems difficult at first to fall lower than the squire; but this fool, great as he is, finds an admirer and humble foil in his cousin Silence. Vain of his acquaintance with Sir John, who makes a butt of him, he exclaims, "Would, cousin Silence, that thou had'st seen that which this knight and I have seen!"—"Aye, Master Shallow, we have heard the chimes at midnight," says Sir John. To Falstaff's observation "I did not think Master Silence had been a man of this mettle," Silence answers, "Who, I? I have been merry twice and once ere now." What an idea is here conveyed of a prodigality of living? What good husbandry and economical self-denial in his pleasures? What a stock of lively recollections? It is curious that Shakespear has ridiculed in Justice Shallow, who was "in some authority under the king," that disposition to unmeaning tautology which is the regal infirmity of later times, and which, it may be supposed, he acquired from talking to his cousin Silence, and receiving no answers.

"*Falstaff*. You have here a goodly dwelling, and a rich.

Shallow. Barren, barren, barren; beggars all, beggars all, Sir John: marry, good air. Spread Davy, spread Davy. Well said, Davy.

Falstaff. This Davy serves you for good uses.

Shallow. A good varlet, a good varlet, a very good varlet. By the mass, I have drank too much sack at supper. A good varlet. Now sit down, now sit down. Come, cousin."

The true spirit of humanity, the thorough knowledge of the stuff we are made of, the practical wisdom with the seeming fooleries in the whole of the garden-scene at Shallow's country-seat, and just before in the exquisite dialogue between him and Silence on the death of old Double, have no parallel anywhere else. In one point of view, they are laughable in the extreme; in another they are equally affecting, if it is affecting to shew *what a little thing is human life*, what a poor forked creature man is!

The heroic and serious part of these two plays founded on the story of Henry IV. is not inferior to the comic and farcical. The characters of Hotspur and Prince Henry are two of the most beautiful and dramatic, both in themselves and from contrast, that ever were drawn. They are the essence of chivalry. We like Hotspur the best upon the whole, perhaps because he was unfortunate.—The characters of their fathers, Henry IV. and old Northumberland, are kept up equally well. Henry naturally succeeds by his prudence and caution in keeping what he has got; Northumberland fails in his enterprise from an excess of the same quality, and is caught in the web of his own cold, dilatory policy. Owen Glendower is a masterly character. It is as bold and original as it is intelligible and thoroughly natural. The disputes between him and Hotspur are managed with infinite address and insight into nature. We cannot help pointing out here some very beautiful lines, where Hotspur describes the fight between Glendower and Mortimer.

> ——"When on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,
> In single opposition hand to hand,
> He did confound the best part of an hour
> In changing hardiment with great Glendower:
> Three times they breath'd, and three times did they drink,
> Upon agreement, of swift Severn's flood;
> Who then affrighted with their bloody looks,
> Ran fearfully among the trembling reeds,
> And hid his crisp head in the hollow bank,
> Blood-stained with these valiant combatants."

The peculiarity and the excellence of Shakespear's poetry is, that it seems as if he made his imagination the

hand-maid of nature, and nature the plaything of his imagination. He appears to have been all the characters, and in all the situations he describes. It is as if either he had had all their feelings, or had lent them all his genius to express themselves. There cannot be stronger instances of this than Hotspur's rage when Henry IV. forbids him to speak of Mortimer, his insensibility to all that his father and uncle urge to calm him, and his fine abstracted apostrophe to honour, "By heaven methinks it were an easy leap to pluck bright honour from the moon," &c. After all, notwithstanding the gallantry, generosity, good temper, and idle freaks of the mad-cap Prince of Wales, we should not have been sorry, if Northumberland's force had come up in time to decide the fate of the battle of Shrewsbury; at least, we always heartily sympathise with Lady Percy's grief, when she exclaims,

> "Had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers,
> To-day might I (hanging on Hotspur's neck)
> Have talked of Monmouth's grave."

The truth is, that we never could forgive the Prince's treatment of Falstaff; though perhaps Shakespear knew what was best, according to the history, the nature of the times, and of the man. We speak only as dramatic critics. Whatever terror the French in those days might have of Henry V. yet, to the readers of poetry at present, Falstaff is the better man of the two. We think of him and quote him oftener.

HENRY V.

Henry V. is a very favourite monarch with the English nation, and he appears to have been also a favourite with Shakespear, who labours hard to apologise for the actions of the king, by shewing us the character of the man, as "the king of good fellows." He scarcely deserves this honour. He was fond of war and low company:—we know little else of him. He was careless, dissolute, and

ambitious;—idle, or doing mischief. In private, he seemed to have no idea of the common decencies of life, which he subjected to a kind of regal licence; in public affairs, he seemed to have no idea of any rule of right or wrong, but brute force, glossed over with a little religious hypocrisy and archiepiscopal advice. His principles did not change with his situation and professions. His adventure on Gadshill was a prelude to the affair of Agincourt, only a bloodless one; Falstaff was a puny prompter of violence and outrage, compared with the pious and politic Archbishop of Canterbury, who gave the king *carte blanche*, in a genealogical tree of his family, to rob and murder in circles of latitude and longitude abroad—to save the possessions of the church at home. This appears in the speeches in Shakespear, where the hidden motives that actuate princes and their advisers in war and policy are better laid open than in speeches from the throne or woolsack. Henry, because he did not know how to govern his own kingdom, determined to make war upon his neighbours. Because his own title to the crown was doubtful, he laid claim to that of France. Because he did not know how to exercise the enormous power, which had just dropped into his hands, to any one good purpose, he immediately undertook (a cheap and obvious resource of sovereignty) to do all the mischief he could. Even if absolute monarchs had the wit to find out objects of laudable ambition, they could only "plume up their wills" in adhering to the more sacred formula of the royal prerogative, "the right divine of kings to govern wrong," because will is only then triumphant when it is opposed to the will of others, because the pride of power is only then shewn, not when it consults the rights and interests of others, but when it insults and tramples on all justice and all humanity. Henry declares his resolution "when France is his, to bend it to his awe, or break it all to pieces"—a resolution worthy of a conqueror, to destroy all that he cannot enslave; and what adds to the joke, he lays all the blame of the consequences of his ambition on those who will not submit tamely to his tyranny. Such is

the history of kingly power, from the beginning to the end of the world ;—with this difference, that the object of war formerly, when the people adhered to their allegiance, was to depose kings ; the object latterly, since the people swerved from their allegiance, has been to restore kings, and to make common cause against mankind. The object of our late invasion and conquest of France was to restore the legitimate monarch, the descendant of Hugh Capet, to the throne : Henry V. in his time made war on and deposed the descendant of this very Hugh Capet, on the plea that he was a usurper and illegitimate. What would the great modern catspaw of legitimacy and restorer of divine right have said to the claim of Henry and the title of the descendants of Hugh Capet ? Henry V. it is true, was a hero, a King of England, and the conqueror of the king of France. Yet we feel little love or admiration for him. He was a hero, that is, he was ready to sacrifice his own life for the pleasure of destroying thousands of other lives : he was a king of England, but not a constitutional one, and we only like kings according to the law ; lastly, he was a conqueror of the French king, and for this we dislike him less than if he had conquered the French people. How then do we like him ? We like him in the play. There he is a very amiable monster, a very splendid pageant. As we like to gaze at a panther or a young lion in their cages in the Tower, and catch a pleasing horror from their glistening eyes, their velvet paws, and dreadless roar, so we take a very romantic, heroic, patriotic, and poetical delight in the boasts and feats of our younger Harry, as they appear on the stage and are confined to lines of ten syllables ; where no blood follows the stroke that wounds our ears, where no harvest bends beneath horses' hoofs, no city flames, no little child is butchered, no dead men's bodies are found piled on heaps and festering the next morning—in the orchestra !

So much for the politics of this play ; now for the poetry. Perhaps one of the most striking images in all Shakespear is that given of war in the first lines of the Prologue.

"O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars, and *at his heels*
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire
Crouch for employment."

Rubens, if he had painted it, would not have improved upon this simile.

The conversation between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely, relating to the sudden change in the manners of Henry V. is among the well-known *Beauties* of Shakespear. It is indeed admirable both for strength and grace. It has sometimes occurred to us that Shakespear, in describing "the reformation" of the Prince, might have had an eye to himself—

"Which is a wonder how his grace should glean it,
Since his addiction was to courses vain,
His companies unletter'd, rude and shallow,
His hours fill'd up with riots, banquets, sports;
And never noted in him any study,
Any retirement, any sequestration
From open haunts and popularity.
Ely. The strawberry grows underneath the nettle,
And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best
Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality:
And so the prince obscur'd his contemplation
Under the veil of wildness, which no doubt
Grew like the summer-grass, fastest by night,
Unseen, yet crescive in his faculty."

This at least is as probable an account of the progress of the poet's mind as we have met with in any of the Essays on the Learning of Shakespear.

Nothing can be better managed than the caution which the king gives the meddling Archbishop, not to advise him rashly to engage in the war with France, his scrupulous dread of the consequences of that advice, and his eager desire to hear and follow it.

"And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,
That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,
Or nicely charge your understanding soul
With opening titles miscreate, whose right
Suits not in native colours with the truth.

For God doth know how many now in health
Shall drop their blood, in approbation
Of what your reverence shall incite us to.
Therefore take heed how you impawn your person,
How you awake our sleeping sword of war;
We charge you in the name of God, take heed.
For never two such kingdoms did contend
Without much fall of blood, whose guiltless drops
Are every one a woe, a sore complaint
'Gainst him, whose wrong gives edge unto the swords
That make such waste in brief mortality.
Under this conjuration, speak, my lord;
For we will hear, note, and believe in heart,
That what you speak, is in your conscience wash'd,
As pure as sin with baptism."

Another characteristic instance of the blindness of human nature to every thing but its own interests, is the complaint made by the king of "the ill neighbourhood" of the Scot in attacking England when she was attacking France.

"For once the eagle England being in prey,
To her unguarded nest the weazel Scot
Comes sneaking, and so sucks her princely eggs."

It is worth observing that in all these plays, which give an admirable picture of the spirit of the *good old times*, the moral inference does not at all depend upon the nature of the actions, but on the dignity or meanness of the persons committing them. "The eagle England" has a right "to be in prey," but "the weazel Scot" has none "to come sneaking to her nest," which she has left to pounce upon others. Might was right, without equivocation or disguise, in that heroic and chivalrous age. The substitution of right for might, even in theory, is among the refinements and abuses of modern philosophy.

A more beautiful rhetorical delineation of the effects of subordination in a commonwealth can hardly be conceived than the following:—

"For government, though high and low and lower,
Put into parts, doth keep in one concent,
Congruing in a full and natural close,
Like music.
——— Therefore heaven doth divide
The state of man in divers functions,
Setting endeavour in continual motion;

To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,
Obedience : for so work the honey-bees ;
Creatures that by a rule in nature, teach
The art of order to a peopled kingdom.
They have a king, and officers of sorts :
Where some, like magistrates, correct at home ;
Others, like merchants, venture trade abroad ;
Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings,
Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds ;
Which pillage they with merry march bring home
To the tent-royal of their emperor ;
Who, busied in his majesty, surveys
The singing mason building roofs of gold ;
The civil citizens kneading up the honey ;
The poor mechanic porters crowding in
Their heavy burthens at his narrow gate ;
The sad-eyed justice, with his surly hum,
Delivering o'er to executors pale
The lazy yawning drone. I this infer,—
That many things, having full reference
To one concent, may work contrariously :
As many arrows, loosed several ways,
Fly to one mark ;
As many several ways meet in one town ;
As many fresh streams meet in one salt sea ;
As many lines close in the dial's centre ;
So may a thousand actions, once a-foot,
End in one purpose, and be all well borne
Without defeat."

HENRY V. is but one of Shakespear's second-rate plays. Yet by quoting passages, like this, from his second-rate plays alone, we might make a volume "rich with his praise,"

"As is the oozy bottom of the sea
With sunken wrack and sumless treasuries."

Of this sort are the king's remonstrance to Scroop, Grey, and Cambridge, on the detection of their treason, his address to the soldiers at the siege of Harfleur, and the still finer one before the battle of Agincourt, the description of the night before the battle, and the reflections on ceremony put into the mouth of the king.

"O hard condition ; twin-born with greatness,
Subjected to the breath of every fool,
Whose sense no more can feel but his own wringing !
What infinite heart's ease must kings neglect,

That private men enjoy ; and what have kings,
That privates have not too, save ceremony ?
Save general ceremony ?
And what art thou, thou idol ceremony ?
What kind of God art thou, that suffer'st more
Of mortal griefs, than do thy worshippers ?
What are thy rents ? what are thy comings-in ?
O ceremony, shew me but thy worth !
What is thy soul, O adoration ?
Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form,
Creating awe and fear in other men ?
Wherein thou art less happy, being feared,
Than they in fearing.
What drink'st thou oft, instead of homage sweet,
But poison'd flattery ? O, be sick, great greatness,
And bid thy ceremony give thee cure !
Think'st thou, the fiery fever will go out
With titles blown from adulation ?
Will it give place to flexure and low bending ?
Can'st thou, when thou command'st the beggar's knee,
Command the health of it ? No, thou proud dream,
That play'st so subtly with a king's repose,
I am a king, that find thee : and I know,
'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,
The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
The enter-tissu'd robe of gold and pearl,
The farsed title running 'fore the king,
The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp
That beats upon the high shore of this world,
No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,
Not all these, laid in bed majestical,
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave ;
Who, with a body fill'd, and vacant mind,
Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread,
Never sees horrid night, the child of hell :
But like a lacquey, from the rise to set,
Sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night
Sleeps in Elysium ; next day, after dawn,
Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse ;
And follows so the ever-running year
With profitable labour, to his grave :
And, but for ceremony, such a wretch,
Winding up days with toil, and nights with sleep,
Has the forehand and vantage of a king.
The slave, a member of the country's peace,
Enjoys it ; but in gross brain little wots,
What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace,
Whose hours the peasant best advantages."

Most of these passages are well known: there is one, which we do not remember to have seen noticed, and yet it is no whit inferior to the rest in heroic beauty. It is the account of the deaths of York and Suffolk.

> "*Exeter.* The duke of York commends him to your majesty.
> *K. Henry.* Lives he, good uncle? thrice within this hour,
> I saw him down; thrice up again, and fighting;
> From helmet to the spur all blood he was.
> *Exeter.* In which array (brave soldier) doth he lie,
> Larding the plain: and by his bloody side
> (Yoke-fellow to his honour-owing wounds)
> The noble earl of Suffolk also lies.
> Suffolk first died: and York, all haggled o'er,
> Comes to him, where in gore he lay insteep'd,
> And takes him by the beard; kisses the gashes,
> That bloodily did yawn upon his face;
> And cries aloud—*Tarry, dear cousin Suffolk!*
> *My soul shall thine keep company to heaven:*
> *Tarry, sweet soul, for mine, then fly a-breast;*
> *As, in this glorious and well-foughten field,*
> *We kept together in our chivalry!*
> Upon these words I came, and cheer'd him up;
> He smil'd me in the face, raught me his hand,
> And, with a feeble gripe, says—*Dear my lord,*
> *Commend my service to my sovereign.*
> So did he turn, and over Suffolk's neck
> He threw his wounded arm, and kiss'd his lips;
> And so, espous'd to death, with blood he seal'd
> A testament of noble-ending love."

But we must have done with splendid quotations. The behaviour of the king, in the difficult and doubtful circumstances in which he is placed, is as patient and modest as it is spirited and lofty in his prosperous fortune. The character of the French nobles is also very admirably depicted; and the Dauphin's praise of his horse shews the vanity of that class of persons in a very striking point of view. Shakespear always accompanies a foolish prince with a satirical courtier, as we see in this instance. The comic parts of HENRY V. are very inferior to those of *Henry IV.* Falstaff is dead, and without him, Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, are satellites without a sun. Fluellen the Welchman is the most entertaining character in the piece. He is good-natured, brave, choleric, and pedantic. His

parallel between Alexander and Harry of Monmouth, and his desire to have "some disputations" with Captain Macmorris on the discipline of the Roman wars, in the heat of the battle, are never to be forgotten. His treatment of Pistol is as good as Pistol's treatment of his French prisoner. There are two other remarkable prose passages in this play: the conversation of Henry in disguise with the three sentinels on the duties of a soldier, and his courtship of Katherine in broken French. We like them both exceedingly, though the first savours perhaps too much of the king, and the last too little of the lover.

HENRY VI.

IN THREE PARTS

During the time of the civil wars of York and Lancaster, England was a perfect bear-garden, and Shakespear has given us a very lively picture of the scene. The three parts of Henry VI. convey a picture of very little else; and are inferior to the other historical plays. They have brilliant passages; but the general ground-work is comparatively poor and meagre, the style "flat and unraised." There are few lines like the following:—

> "Glory is like a circle in the water;
> Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,
> Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought."

The first part relates to the wars in France after the death of Henry V. and the story of the Maid of Orleans. She is here almost as scurvily treated as in Voltaire's Pucelle. Talbot is a very magnificent sketch: there is something as formidable in this portrait of him, as there would be in a monumental figure of him or in the sight of the armour which he wore. The scene in which he visits the Countess Auvergne, who seeks to entrap him, is a very spirited one,

and his description of his own treatment while a prisoner to the French not less remarkable.

> "*Salisbury*. Yet tell'st thou not how thou wert entertain'd.
> *Talbot*. With scoffs and scorns, and contumelious taunts.
> In open market-place produced they me,
> To be a public spectacle to all.
> Here, said they, is the terror of the French,
> The scarecrow that affrights our children so.
> Then broke I from the officers that led me,
> And with my nails digg'd stones out of the ground,
> To hurl at the beholders of my shame.
> My grisly countenance made others fly,
> None durst come near for fear of sudden death.
> In iron walls they deemed me not secure:
> So great a fear my name amongst them spread,
> That they suppos'd I could rend bars of steel,
> And spurn in pieces posts of adamant.
> Wherefore a guard of chosen shot I had:
> They walk'd about me every minute-while;
> And if I did but stir out of my bed,
> Ready they were to shoot me to the heart."

The second part relates chiefly to the contests between the nobles during the minority of Henry, and the death of Gloucester, the good Duke Humphrey. The character of Cardinal Beaufort is the most prominent in the group: the account of his death is one of our author's masterpieces. So is the speech of Gloucester to the nobles on the loss of the provinces of France by the King's marriage with Margaret of Anjou. The pretensions and growing ambition of the Duke of York, the father of Richard III. are also very ably developed. Among the episodes, the tragi-comedy of Jack Cade, and the detection of the impostor Simcox are truly edifying.

The third part describes Henry's loss of his crown: his death takes place in the last act, which is usually thrust into the common acting play of *Richard III.* The character of Gloucester, afterwards King Richard, is here very powerfully commenced, and his dangerous designs and long-reaching ambition are fully described in his soliloquy in the third act, beginning, "Aye, Edward will use women honourably." Henry VI. is drawn as distinctly as his high-spirited Queen, and notwithstanding the very

mean figure which Henry makes as a King, we still feel more respect for him than for his wife.

We have already observed that Shakespear was scarcely more remarkable for the force and marked contrasts of his characters than for the truth and subtlety with which he has distinguished those which approached the nearest to each other. For instance, the soul of Othello is hardly more distinct from that of Iago than that of Desdemona is shewn to be from Æmilia's; the ambition of Macbeth is as distinct from the ambition of Richard III. as it is from the meekness of Duncan; the real madness of Lear is as different from the feigned madness of Edgar[1] as from the babbling of the fool; the contrast between wit and folly in Falstaff and Shallow is not more characteristic though more obvious than the gradations of folly, loquacious or reserved, in Shallow and Silence; and again, the gallantry of Prince Henry is as little confounded with that of Hotspur as with the cowardice of Falstaff, or as the sensual and philosophic cowardice of the Knight is with the pitiful and cringing cowardice of Parolles. All these several personages were as different in Shakespear as they would have been in themselves: his imagination borrowed from the life, and every circumstance, object, motive, passion, operated there as it would in reality, and produced a world of men and women as distinct, as true and as various as those that exist in nature. The peculiar property of Shakespear's imagination was this truth, accompanied with the unconsciousness of nature: indeed, imagination to be perfect must be unconscious, at least in production; for nature is so.—We shall attempt one example more in the characters of Richard II. and Henry VI.

The characters and situations of both these persons were so nearly alike, that they would have been completely confounded by a common-place poet. Yet they are kept quite distinct in Shakespear. Both were kings, and both unfortunate. Both lost their crowns owing to their

[1] There is another instance of the same distinction in Hamlet and Ophelia. Hamlet's pretended madness would make a very good real madness in any other author.

mismanagement and imbecility; the one from a thoughtless, wilful abuse of power, the other from an indifference to it. The manner in which they bear their misfortunes corresponds exactly to the causes which led to them. The one is always lamenting the loss of his power which he has not the spirit to regain; the other seems only to regret that he had ever been king, and is glad to be rid of the power, with the trouble; the effeminacy of the one is that of a voluptuary, proud, revengeful, impatient of contradiction, and inconsolable in his misfortunes; the effeminacy of the other is that of an indolent, good-natured mind, naturally averse to the turmoils of ambition and the cares of greatness, and who wishes to pass his time in monkish indolence and contemplation.—Richard bewails the loss of the kingly power only as it was the means of gratifying his pride and luxury; Henry regards it only as a means of doing right, and is less desirous of the advantages to be derived from possessing it than afraid of exercising it wrong. In knighting a young soldier, he gives him ghostly advice—

> "Edward Plantagenet, arise a knight,
> And learn this lesson, draw thy sword in right."

Richard II. in the first speeches of the play betrays his real character. In the first alarm of his pride, on hearing of Bolingbroke's rebellion, before his presumption has met with any check, he exclaims—

> "Mock not my senseless conjuration, lords:
> This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones
> Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king
> Shall falter under proud rebellious arms.
>
> * * * * * * * * *
>
> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm from an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly man cannot depose
> The Deputy elected by the Lord.
> For every man that Bolingbroke hath prest,
> To lift sharp steel against our golden crown,
> Heaven for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
> A glorious angel; then if angels fight,
> Weak men must fall; for Heaven still guards the right.

Yet, notwithstanding this royal confession of faith, on the very first news of actual disaster, all his conceit of himself as the peculiar favourite of Providence vanishes into air.

> "But now the blood of twenty thousand men
> Did triumph in my face, and they are fled.
> All souls that will be safe fly from my side ;
> For time hath set a blot upon my pride."

Immediately after, however, recollecting that "cheap defence" of the divinity of kings which is to be found in opinion, he is for arming his name against his enemies.

> "Awake, thou coward Majesty, thou sleep'st ;
> Is not the King's name forty thousand names ?
> Arm, arm, my name : a puny subject strikes
> At thy great glory."

King Henry does not make any such vapouring resistance to the loss of his crown, but lets it slip from off his head as a weight which he is neither able nor willing to bear ; stands quietly by to see the issue of the contest for his kingdom, as if it were a game at push-pin, and is pleased when the odds prove against him.

When Richard first hears of the death of his favourites, Bushy, Bagot, and the rest, he indignantly rejects all idea of any further efforts, and only indulges in the extravagant impatience of his grief and his despair, in that fine speech which has been so often quoted :—

> "*Aumerle.* Where is the duke my father, with his power ?
> *K. Richard.* No matter where : of comfort no man speak :
> Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,
> Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
> Write sorrow in the bosom of the earth !
> Let's chuse executors, and talk of wills :
> And yet not so—for what can we bequeath,
> Save our deposed bodies to the ground ?
> Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's,
> And nothing can we call our own but death,
> And that small model of the barren earth,
> Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
> For heaven's sake let us sit upon the ground,
> And tell sad stories of the death of Kings :
> How some have been depos'd, some slain in war ;
> Some haunted by the ghosts they dispossess'd ;
> Some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd ;

All murder'd:—for within the hollow crown,
That rounds the mortal temples of a king,
Keeps death his court: and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp!
Allowing him a breath, a little scene
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks;
Infusing him with self and vain conceit—
As if this flesh, which walls about our life,
Were brass impregnable; and, humour'd thus,
Comes at the last, and, with a little pin,
Bores through his castle wall, and—farewell king!
Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
With solemn reverence; throw away respect,
Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
For you have but mistook me all this while:
I live on bread like you, feel want, taste grief,
Need friends, like you;—subjected thus,
How can you say to me—I am a king?"

There is as little sincerity afterwards in his affected resignation to his fate, as there is fortitude in this exaggerated picture of his misfortunes before they have happened.

When Northumberland comes back with the message from Bolingbroke, he exclaims, anticipating the result,—

"What must the king do now? Must he submit?
The king shall do it: must he be depos'd?
The king shall be contented: must he lose
The name of king? O' God's name let it go.
I'll give my jewels for a set of beads;
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage;
My gay apparel for an alms-man's gown;
My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood;
My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff;
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave—
A little, little grave, an obscure grave."

How differently is all this expressed in King Henry's soliloquy, during the battle with Edward's party:—

"This battle fares like to the morning's war,
When dying clouds contend with growing light,
What time the shepherd blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day or night.
Here on this mole-hill will I sit me down;
To whom God will, there be the victory!
For Margaret my Queen and Clifford too

Have chid me from the battle, swearing both
They prosper best of all whence I am thence.
Would I were dead, if God's good will were so.
For what is in this world but grief and woe ?
O God ! methinks it were a happy life
To be no better than a homely swain,
To sit upon a hill as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run :
How many make the hour full complete,
How many hours bring about the day,
How many days will finish up the year,
How many years a mortal man may live.
When this is known, then to divide the times ;
So many hours must I tend my flock,
So many hours must I take my rest,
So many hours must I contemplate,
So many hours must I sport myself ;
So many days my ewes have been with young,
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yean,
So many months ere I shall shear the fleece :
So many minutes, hours, weeks, months, and years
Past over, to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
Ah ! what a life were this ! how sweet, how lovely !
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich embroidered canopy
To kings that fear their subjects' treachery ?
O yes it doth, a thousand fold it doth.
And to conclude, the shepherds' homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
Is far beyond a prince's delicates,
His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
His body couched in a curious bed,
When care, mistrust, and treasons wait on him."

This is a true and beautiful description of a naturally quiet and contented disposition, and not, like the former, the splenetic effusion of disappointed ambition.

In the last scene of Richard II. his despair lends him courage : he beats the keeper, slays two of his assassins, and dies with imprecations in his mouth against Sir Pierce Exton, who "had staggered his royal person." Henry, when he is seized by the deer-stealers, only reads

them a moral lecture on the duty of allegiance and the sanctity of an oath; and when stabbed by Gloucester in the tower, reproaches him with his crimes, but pardons him his own death.

RICHARD III.

Richard III. may be considered as properly a stage-play: it belongs to the theatre, rather than to the closet. We shall therefore criticise it chiefly with a reference to the manner in which we have seen it performed. It is the character in which Garrick came out: it was the second character in which Mr. Kean appeared, and in which he acquired his fame. Shakespear we have always with us: actors we have only for a few seasons; and therefore some account of them may be acceptable, if not to our cotemporaries, to those who come after us, if "that rich and idle personage, Posterity," should deign to look into our writings.

It is possible to form a higher conception of the character of Richard than that given by Mr. Kean: but we cannot imagine any character represented with greater distinctness and precision, more perfectly *articulated* in every part. Perhaps indeed there is too much of what is technically called execution. When we first saw this celebrated actor in the part, we thought he sometimes failed from an exuberance of manner, and dissipated the impression of the general character by the variety of his resources. To be complete, his delineation of it should have more solidity, depth, sustained and impassioned feeling, with somewhat less brilliancy, with fewer glancing lights, pointed transitions, and pantomimic evolutions.

The Richard of Shakespear is towering and lofty; equally impetuous and commanding; haughty, violent, and subtle; bold and treacherous; confident in his strength as well as in his cunning; raised high by his birth, and

higher by his talents and his crimes; a royal usurper, a princely hypocrite; a tyrant, and a murderer of the house of Plantagenet.

> "But I was born so high:
> Our aery buildeth in the cedar's top,
> And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun."

The idea conveyed in these lines (which are indeed omitted in the miserable medley acted for RICHARD III.) is never lost sight of by Shakespear, and should not be out of the actor's mind for a moment. The restless and sanguinary Richard is not a man striving to be great, but to be greater than he is; conscious of his strength of will, his power of intellect, his daring courage, his elevated station; and making use of these advantages to commit unheard-of crimes, and to shield himself from remorse and infamy.

If Mr. Kean does not entirely succeed in concentrating all the lines of the character, as drawn by Shakespear, he gives an animation, vigour, and relief to the part which we have not seen equalled. He is more refined than Cooke; more bold, varied, and original than Kemble in the same character. In some parts he is deficient in dignity, and particularly in the scenes of state business, he has by no means an air of artificial authority. There is at times an aspiring elevation, an enthusiastic rapture in his expectations of attaining the crown, and at others a gloating expression of sullen delight, as if he already clenched the bauble, and held it in his grasp. The courtship scene with Lady Anne is an admirable exhibition of smooth and smiling villainy. The progress of wily adulation, of encroaching humility, is finely marked by his action, voice and eye. He seems, like the first Tempter, to approach his prey, secure of the event, and as if success had smoothed his way before him. The late Mr. Cooke's manner of representing this scene was more vehement, hurried, and full of anxious uncertainty. This, though more natural in general, was less in character in this particular instance. Richard should woo less as a lover than as an actor—to shew his mental superiority, and

power of making others the playthings of his purposes. Mr. Kean's attitude in leaning against the side of the stage before he comes forward to address Lady Anne, is one of the most graceful and striking ever witnessed on the stage. It would do for Titian to paint. The frequent and rapid transition of his voice from the expression of the fiercest passion to the most familiar tones of conversation was that which gave a peculiar grace of novelty to his acting on his first appearance. This has been since imitated and caricatured by others, and he himself uses the artifice more sparingly than he did. His bye-play is excellent. His manner of bidding his friends "Good night," after pausing with the point of his sword, drawn slowly backward and forward on the ground, as if considering the plan of the battle next day, is a particularly happy and natural thought. He gives to the two last acts of the play the greatest animation and effect. He fills every part of the stage; and makes up for the deficiency of his person by what has been sometimes objected to as an excess of action. The concluding scene in which he is killed by Richmond is the most brilliant of the whole. He fights at last like one drunk with wounds; and the attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is wrested from him, has a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had power to kill.—Mr. Kean has since in a great measure effaced the impression of his Richard III. by the superior efforts of his genius in Othello (his masterpiece), in the murder-scene in Macbeth, in Richard II., in Sir Giles Overreach, and lastly in Oroonoko; but we still like to look back to his first performance of this part, both because it first assured his admirers of his future success, and because we bore our feeble but, at that time, not useless testimony to the merits of this very original actor, on which the town was considerably divided for no other reason than because they *were* original.

The manner in which Shakespear's plays have been generally altered or rather mangled by modern mechanists, is a disgrace to the English stage. The patch-work

RICHARD III. which is acted under the sanction of his name, and which was manufactured by Cibber, is a striking example of this remark.

The play itself is undoubtedly a very powerful effusion of Shakespear's genius. The ground-work of the character of Richard, that mixture of intellectual vigour with moral depravity, in which Shakespear delighted to shew his strength—gave full scope as well as temptation to the exercise of his imagination. The character of his hero is almost every where predominant, and marks its lurid track throughout. The original play is however too long for representation, and there are some few scenes which might be better spared than preserved, and by omitting which it would remain a complete whole. The only rule, indeed, for altering Shakespear is to retrench certain passages which may be considered either as superfluous or obsolete, but not to add or transpose any thing. The arrangement and developement of the story, and the mutual contrast and combination of the *dramatis personæ*, are in general as finely managed as the developement of the characters or the expression of the passions.

This rule has not been adhered to in the present instance. Some of the most important and striking passages in the principal character have been omitted, to make room for idle and misplaced extracts from other plays ; the only intention of which seems to have been to make the character of Richard as odious and disgusting as possible. It is apparently for no other purpose than to make Gloucester stab King Henry on the stage, that the fine abrupt introduction of the character in the opening of the play is lost in the tedious whining morality of the uxorious king (taken from another play) ;—we say *tedious*, because it interrupts the business of the scene, and loses its beauty and effect by having no intelligible connection with the previous character of the mild, well-meaning monarch. The passages which the unfortunate Henry has to recite are beautiful and pathetic in themselves, but they have nothing to do with the world that Richard has to "bustle in." In the same spirit of vulgar caricature is the scene

between Richard and Lady Anne (when his wife) interpolated without any authority, merely to gratify this favourite propensity to disgust and loathing. With the same perverse consistency, Richard, after his last fatal struggle, is raised up by some Galvanic process, to utter the imprecation, without any motive but pure malignity, which Shakespear has so properly put into the mouth of Northumberland on hearing of Percy's death. To make room for these worse than needless additions, many of the most striking passages in the real play have been omitted by the foppery and ignorance of the prompt-book critics. We do not mean to insist merely on passages which are fine as poetry and to the reader, such as Clarence's dream, &c. but on those which are important to the understanding of the character, and peculiarly adapted for stage-effect. We will give the following as instances among several others. The first is the scene where Richard enters abruptly to the queen and her friends to defend himself:—

"*Gloucester.* They do me wrong, and I will not endure it.
Who are they that complain unto the king,
That I forsooth am stern, and love them not?
By holy Paul, they love his grace but lightly,
That fill his ears with such dissentious rumours:
Because I cannot flatter and look fair,
Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive, and cog,
Duck with French nods, and apish courtesy,
I must be held a rancorous enemy.
Cannot a plain man live, and think no harm,
But thus his simple truth must be abus'd
With silken, sly, insinuating Jacks?
Gray. To whom in all this presence speaks your grace?
Gloucester. To thee, that hast nor honesty nor grace;
When have I injur'd thee, when done thee wrong?
Or thee? or thee? or any of your faction?
A plague upon you all!"

Nothing can be more characteristic than the turbulent pretensions to meekness and simplicity in this address. Again, the versatility and adroitness of Richard is admirably described in the following ironical conversation with Brakenbury:—

"*Brakenbury.* I beseech your graces both to pardon me.
His majesty hath straitly given in charge,

That no man shall have private conference,
Of what degree soever, with your brother.
Gloucester. E'en so, and please your worship, Brakenbury.
You may partake of any thing we say:
We speak no treason, man—we say the king
Is wise and virtuous, and his noble queen
Well strook in years, fair, and not jealous.
We say that Shore's wife hath a pretty foot,
A cherry lip,
A bonny eye, a passing pleasing tongue;
That the queen's kindred are made gentlefolks.
How say you, sir? Can you deny all this?
Brakenbury. With this, my lord, myself have nought to do.
Gloucester. What, fellow, naught to do with mistress Shore?
I tell you, sir, he that doth naught with her,
Excepting one, were best to do it secretly alone.
Brakenbury. What one, my lord?
Gloucester. Her husband, knave—would'st thou betray me?"

The feigned reconciliation of Gloucester with the queen's kinsmen is also a master-piece. One of the finest strokes in the play, and which serves to shew as much as any thing the deep, plausible manners of Richard, is the unsuspecting security of Hastings, at the very time the former is plotting his death, and when that very appearance of cordiality and good-humour on which Hastings builds his confidence arises from Richard's consciousness of having betrayed him to his ruin. This, with the whole character of Hastings, is omitted.

Perhaps the two most beautiful passages in the original play are the farewell apostrophe of the queen to the Tower, where the children are shut up from her, and Tyrrel's description of their death. We will finish our quotations with them.

"*Queen.* Stay, yet look back with me unto the Tower;
Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes,
Whom envy hath immured within your walls;
Rough cradle for such little pretty ones,
Rude, rugged nurse, old sullen play-fellow,
For tender princes!"

The other passage is the account of their death by Tyrrel:—

"Dighton and Forrest, whom I did suborn
To do this piece of ruthless butchery,

> Albeit they were flesh'd villains, bloody dogs,—
> Melting with tenderness and mild compassion,
> Wept like to children in their death's sad story :
> O thus ! quoth Dighton, lay the gentle babes ;
> Thus, thus, quoth Forrest, girdling one another
> Within their innocent alabaster arms ;
> Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,
> And in that summer beauty kissed each other ;
> A book of prayers on their pillow lay,
> Which once, quoth Forrest, almost changed my mind :
> But oh the devil !—there the villain stopped ;
> When Dighton thus told on—we smothered
> The most replenished sweet work of nature,
> That from the prime creation ere she framed."

These are some of those wonderful bursts of feeling, done to the life, to the very height of fancy and nature, which our Shakespear alone could give. We do not insist on the repetition of these last passages as proper for the stage : we should indeed be loth to trust them in the mouth of almost any actor : but we should wish them to be retained in preference at least to the fantoccini exhibition of the young princes, Edward and York, bandying childish wit with their uncle.

HENRY VIII.

This play contains little action or violence of passion, yet it has considerable interest of a more mild and thoughtful cast, and some of the most striking passages in the author's works. The character of Queen Katherine is the most perfect delineation of matronly dignity, sweetness, and resignation, that can be conceived. Her appeals to the protection of the king, her remonstrances to the cardinals, her conversations with her women, shew a noble and generous spirit accompanied with the utmost gentleness of nature. What can be more affecting than her answer to Campeius and Wolsey, who come to visit her as pretended friends.

——— "Nay, forsooth, my friends,
They that must weigh out my afflictions,
They that my trust must grow to, live not here;
They are, as all my comforts are, far hence,
In mine own country, lords."

Dr. Johnson observes of this play, that "the meek sorrows and virtuous distress of Katherine have furnished some scenes, which may be justly numbered among the greatest efforts of tragedy. But the genius of Shakespear comes in and goes out with Katherine. Every other part may be easily conceived and easily written." This is easily said; but with all due deference to so great a reputed authority as that of Johnson, it is not true. For instance, the scene of Buckingham led to execution is one of the most affecting and natural in Shakespear, and one to which there is hardly an approach in any other author. Again, the character of Wolsey, the description of his pride and of his fall, are inimitable, and have, besides their gorgeousness of effect, a pathos, which only the genius of Shakespear could lend to the distresses of a proud, bad man, like Wolsey. There is a sort of child-like simplicity in the very helplessness of his situation, arising from the recollection of his past overbearing ambition. After the cutting sarcasms of his enemies on his disgrace, against which he bears up with a spirit conscious of his own superiority, he breaks out into that fine apostrophe—

"Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness!
This is the state of man; to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
And—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a ripening—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do. I have ventur'd,
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
These many summers in a sea of glory;
But far beyond my depth: my high-blown pride
At length broke under me; and now has left me,
Weary and old with service, to the mercy
Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
Vain pomp and glory of the world, I hate ye!
I feel my heart new open'd: O how wretched
Is that poor man, that hangs on princes' favours!

> There is betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
> That sweet aspect of princes, and our ruin,
> More pangs and fears than war and women have;
> And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
> Never to hope again!"—

There is in this passage, as well as in the well-known dialogue with Cromwell which follows, something which stretches beyond commonplace; nor is the account which Griffiths gives of Wolsey's death less Shakespearian; and the candour with which Queen Katherine listens to the praise of "him whom of all men while living she hated most" adds the last graceful finishing to her character.

Among other images of great individual beauty might be mentioned the description of the effect of Ann Boleyn's presenting herself to the crowd at her coronation.

> ———"While her grace sat down
> To rest awhile, some half an hour or so,
> In a rich chair of state, opposing freely
> The beauty of her person to the people.
> Believe me, sir, she is the goodliest woman
> That ever lay by man. Which when the people
> Had the full view of, *such a noise arose*
> *As the shrouds make at sea in a stiff tempest,*
> *As loud and to as many tunes.*"

The character of Henry VIII. is drawn with great truth and spirit. It is like a very disagreeable portrait, sketched by the hand of a master. His gross appearance, his blustering demeanour, his vulgarity, his arrogance, his sensuality, his cruelty, his hyprocrisy, his want of common decency and common humanity, are marked in strong lines. His traditional peculiarities of expression complete the reality of the picture. The authoritative expletive, "Ha!" with which he intimates his indignation or surprise, has an effect like the first startling sound that breaks from a thunder-cloud. He is of all the monarchs in our history the most disgusting: for he unites in himself all the vices of barbarism and refinement, without their virtues. Other kings before him (such as Richard III.) were tyrants and murderers out of ambition or necessity: they gained or established unjust power by violent means: they destroyed their enemies, or those who

barred their access to the throne or made its tenure insecure. But Henry VIII.'s power is most fatal to those whom he loves : he is cruel and remorseless to pamper his luxurious appetites : bloody and voluptuous ; an amorous murderer ; an uxorious debauchee. His hardened insensibility to the feelings of others is strengthened by the most profligate self-indulgence. The religious hypocrisy, under which he masks his cruelty and his lust, is admirably displayed in the speech in which he describes the first misgivings of his conscience and its increasing throes and terrors, which have induced him to divorce his queen. The only thing in his favour in this play is his treatment of Cranmer : there is also another circumstance in his favour, which is his patronage of Hans Holbein.—It has been said of Shakespear—"No maid could live near such a man." It might with as good reason be said—"No king could live near such a man." His eye would have penetrated through the pomp of circumstance and the veil of opinion. As it is, he has represented such persons to the life—his plays are in this respect the glass of history—he has done them the same justice as if he had been a privy counsellor all his life, and in each successive reign. Kings ought never to be seen upon the stage. In the abstract, they are very disagreeable characters : it is only while living that they are "the best of kings." It is their power, their splendour, it is the apprehension of the personal consequences of their favour or their hatred that dazzles the imagination and suspends the judgment of their favourites or their vassals ; but death cancels the bond of allegiance and of interest ; and seen *as they were*, their power and their pretensions look monstrous and ridiculous. The charge brought against modern philosophy as inimical to loyalty is unjust, because it might as well be brought against other things. No reader of history can be a lover of kings. We have often wondered that Henry VIII. as he is drawn by Shakespear, and as we have seen him represented in all the bloated deformity of mind and person, is not hooted from the English stage.

KING JOHN

KING JOHN is the last of the historical plays we shall have to speak of; and we are not sorry that it is. If we are to indulge our imaginations, we had rather do it upon an imaginary theme; if we are to find subjects for the exercise of our pity and terror, we prefer seeking them in fictitious danger and fictitious distress. It gives a *soreness* to our feelings of indignation or sympathy, when we know that in tracing the progress of sufferings and crimes, we are treading upon real ground, and recollect that the poet's dream "*denoted a foregone conclusion*"—irrevocable ills, not conjured up by fancy, but placed beyond the reach of poetical justice. That the treachery of King John, the death of Arthur, the grief of Constance, had a real truth in history, sharpens the sense of pain, while it hangs a leaden weight on the heart and the imagination. Something whispers us that we have no right to make a mock of calamities like these, or to turn the truth of things into the puppet and plaything of our fancies. "To consider thus" may be "to consider too curiously"; but still we think that the actual truth of the particular events, in proportion as we are conscious of it, is a drawback on the pleasure as well as the dignity of tragedy.

KING JOHN has all the beauties of language and all the richness of the imagination to relieve the painfulness of the subject. The character of King John himself is kept pretty much in the back ground; it is only marked in by comparatively slight indications. The crimes he is tempted to commit are such as are thrust upon him rather by circumstances and opportunity than of his own seeking: he is here represented as more cowardly than cruel, and as more contemptible than odious. The play embraces only a part of his history. There are however few characters on the stage that excite more disgust and loathing. He has no intellectual grandeur or strength of character to shield him from the indignation which his immediate conduct pro-

vokes: he stands naked and defenceless, in that respect, to the worst we can think of him: and besides, we are impelled to put the very worst construction on his meanness and cruelty by the tender picture of the beauty and helplessness of the object of it, as well as by the frantic and heart-rending pleadings of maternal despair. We do not forgive him the death of Arthur, because he had too late revoked his doom and tried to prevent it; and perhaps because he has himself repented of his black design, our *moral sense* gains courage to hate him the more for it. We take him at his word, and think his purposes must be odious indeed, when he himself shrinks back from them. The scene in which King John suggests to Hubert the design of murdering his nephew is a master-piece of dramatic skill, but it is still inferior, very inferior to the scene between Hubert and Arthur, when the latter learns the orders to put out his eyes. If any thing ever was penned, heart-piercing, mixing the extremes of terror and pity, of that which shocks and that which soothes the mind, it is this scene. We will give it entire, though perhaps it is tasking the reader's sympathy too much.

"*Enter* HUBERT *and Executioner.*

Hubert. Heat me these irons hot, and look you stand
Within the arras; when I strike my foot
Upon the bosom of the ground, rush forth
And bind the boy, which you shall find with me,
Fast to the chair: be heedful: hence, and watch.
Executioner. I hope your warrant will bear out the deed.
Hubert. Uncleanly scruples! fear not you; look to't.—
Young lad, come forth; I have to say with you.

Enter ARTHUR.

Arthur. Good morrow, Hubert.
Hubert. Morrow, little Prince.
Arthur. As little prince (having so great a title
To be more prince) as may be. You are sad.
Hubert. Indeed I have been merrier.
Arthur. Mercy on me!
Methinks no body should be sad but I;
Yet I remember when I was in France,
Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,
Only for wantonness. By my Christendom,
So were I out of prison, and kept sheep,
I should be merry as the day is long.

And so I would be here, but that I doubt
My uncle practises more harm to me.
He is afraid of me, and I of him.
Is it my fault that I was Geoffery's son?
Indeed it is not, and I would to heav'n
I were your son, so you would love me, Hubert.
Hubert. If I talk to him, with his innocent prate
He will awake my mercy, which lies dead;
Therefore I will be sudden, and dispatch. [*Aside.*
Arthur. Are you sick, Hubert? you look pale to-day?
In sooth, I would you were a little sick,
That I might sit all night and watch with you.
Alas, I love you more than you do me.
Hubert. His words do take possession of my bosom.
Read here, young Arthur— [*Shewing a paper.*
How now, foolish rheum, [*Aside.*
Turning dis-piteous torture out of door!
I must be brief, lest resolution drop
Out at mine eyes in tender womanish tears.—
Can you not read it? Is it not fair writ?
Arthur. Too fairly, Hubert, for so foul effect.
Must you with irons burn out both mine eyes?
Hubert. Young boy, I must.
Arthur. And will you?
Hubert. And I will.
Arthur. Have you the heart? When your head did but ache,
I knit my handkerchief about your brows,
(The best I had, a princess wrought it me)
And I did never ask it you again;
And with my hand at midnight held your head;
And like the watchful minutes to the hour,
Still and anon chear'd up the heavy time,
Saying, what lack you? and where lies your grief?
Or, what good love may I perform for you?
Many a poor man's son would have lain still,
And ne'er have spoke a loving word to you;
But you at your sick service had a prince.
Nay, you may think my love was crafty love,
And call it cunning. Do, and if you will:
If heav'n be pleas'd that you must use me ill,
Why then you must——Will you put out mine eyes?
These eyes, that never did, and never shall,
So much as frown on you?
Hubert. I've sworn to do it;
And with hot irons must I burn them out.
Arthur. Oh if an angel should have come to me,
And told me Hubert should put out mine eyes,
I would not have believ'd a tongue but Hubert's.

Hubert. Come forth; do as I bid you.

[*Stamps and the men enter.*

Arthur. O save me, Hubert, save me! my eyes are out
Ev'n with the fierce looks of these bloody men.

Hubert. Give me the iron, I say, and bind him here.

Arthur. Alas, what need you be so boist'rous rough?
I will not struggle, I will stand stone-still.
For heav'n's sake, Hubert, let me not be bound!
Nay, hear me, Hubert! drive these men away,
And I will sit as quiet as a lamb:
I will not stir, nor wince, nor speak a word,
Nor look upon the iron angrily:
Thrust but these men away, and I'll forgive you,
Whatever torment you do put me to.

Hubert. Go, stand within; let me alone with him.

Executioner. I am best pleas'd to be from such a deed.

[*Exit.*

Arthur. Alas, I then have chid away my friend.
He hath a stern look, but a gentle heart;
Let him come back, that his compassion may
Give life to yours.

Hubert. Come, boy, prepare yourself.

Arthur. Is there no remedy?

Hubert. None, but to lose your eyes.

Arthur. O heav'n! that there were but a mote in yours,
A grain, a dust, a gnat, a wand'ring hair,
Any annoyance in that precious sense!
Then, feeling what small things are boist'rous there,
Your vile intent must needs seem horrible.

Hubert. Is this your promise? go to, hold your tongue.

Arthur. Let me not hold my tongue; let me not, Hubert;
Or, Hubert, if you will, cut out my tongue,
So I may keep mine eyes. O spare mine eyes!
Though to no use, but still to look on you.
Lo, by my troth, the instrument is cold,
And would not harm me.

Hubert. I can heat it, boy.

Arthur. No, in good sooth, the fire is dead with grief,
Being create for comfort, to be us'd
In undeserv'd extremes; see else yourself,
There is no malice in this burning coal;
The breath of heav'n hath blown its spirit out,
And strew'd repentant ashes on its head.

Hubert. But with my breath I can revive it, boy.

Arthur. All things that you shall use to do me wrong,
Deny their office; only you do lack
That mercy which fierce fire and iron extend,
Creatures of note for mercy-lacking uses.

Hubert. Well, see to live ; I will not touch thine eyes
For all the treasure that thine uncle owns :
Yet I am sworn, and I did purpose, boy,
With this same very iron to burn them out.
Arthur. O, now you look like Hubert. All this while
You were disguised.
Hubert. Peace ; no more. Adieu,
Your uncle must not know but you are dead.
I'll fill these dogged spies with false reports :
And, pretty child, sleep doubtless and secure,
That Hubert, for the wealth of all the world,
Will not offend thee.
Arthur. O heav'n ! I thank you, Hubert.
Hubert. Silence, no more ; go closely in with me ;
Much danger do I undergo for thee. [*Exeunt.*"

His death afterwards, when he throws himself from his prison walls, excites the utmost pity for his innocence and friendless situation, and well justifies the exaggerated denunciations of Falconbridge to Hubert whom he suspects wrongfully of the deed.

"There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell
As thou shalt be, if thou did'st kill this child.
—If thou did'st but consent
To this most cruel act, do but despair :
And if thou want'st a cord, the smallest thread
That ever spider twisted from her womb
Will strangle thee ; a rush will be a beam
To hang thee on : or would'st thou drown thyself,
Put but a little water in a spoon,
And it shall be as all the ocean,
Enough to stifle such a villain up."

The excess of maternal tenderness, rendered desperate by the fickleness of friends and the injustice of fortune, and made stronger in will, in proportion to the want of all other power, was never more finely expressed than in Constance. The dignity of her answer to King Philip, when she refuses to accompany his messenger, "To me and to the state of my great grief, let kings assemble," her indignant reproach to Austria for deserting her cause, her invocation to death, "that love of misery," however fine and spirited, all yield to the beauty of the passage, where, her passion subsiding into tenderness, she addresses the Cardinal in these words :—

"Oh father Cardinal, I have heard you say
That we shall see and know our friends in heav'n :
If that be, I shall see my boy again,
For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
To him that did but yesterday suspire,
There was not such a gracious creature born.
But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud,
And chase the native beauty from his cheek,
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,
And so he'll die ; and rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heav'n,
I shall not know him ; therefore never, never
Must I behold my pretty Arthur more.
K. Philip. You are as fond of grief as of your child.
Constance. Grief fills the room up of my absent child :
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me ;
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts ;
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form.
Then have I reason to be fond of grief."

The contrast between the mild resignation of Queen Katherine to her own wrongs, and the wild, uncontroulable affliction of Constance for the wrongs which she sustains as a mother, is no less naturally conceived than it is ably sustained throughout these two wonderful characters.

The accompaniment of the comic character of the Bastard was well chosen to relieve the poignant agony of suffering, and the cold cowardly policy of behaviour in the principal characters of this play. Its spirit, invention, volubility of tongue and forwardness in action, are unbounded. *Aliquando sufflaminandus erat*, says Ben Jonson of Shakespear. But we should be sorry if Ben Jonson had been his licenser. We prefer the heedless magnanimity of his wit infinitely to all Jonson's laborious caution. The character of the Bastard's comic humour is the same in essence as that of other comic characters in Shakespear ; they always run on with good things and are never exhausted ; they are always daring and successful. They have words at will, and a flow of wit like a flow of animal spirits. The difference between Falconbridge and the others is that he is a soldier, and

brings his wit to bear upon action, is courageous with his sword as well as tongue, and stimulates his gallantry by his jokes, his enemies feeling the sharpness of his blows and the sting of his sarcasms at the same time. Among his happiest sallies are his descanting on the composition of his own person, his invective against "commodity, tickling commodity," and his expression of contempt for the Archduke of Austria, who had killed his father, which begins in jest but ends in serious earnest. His conduct at the siege of Angiers shews that his resources were not confined to verbal retorts.—The same exposure of the policy of courts and camps, of kings, nobles, priests, and cardinals, takes place here as in the other plays we have gone through, and we shall not go into a disgusting repetition.

This, like the other plays taken from English history, is written in a remarkably smooth and flowing style, very different from some of the tragedies, *Macbeth*, for instance. The passages consist of a series of single lines, not running into one another. This peculiarity in the versification, which is most common in the three parts of *Henry VI.* has been assigned as a reason why those plays were not written by Shakespear. But the same structure of verse occurs in his other undoubted plays, as in *Richard II.* and in *King John.* The following are instances :—

> "That daughter there of Spain, the lady Blanch,
> Is near to England; look upon the years
> Of Lewis the dauphin, and that lovely maid.
> If lusty love should go in quest of beauty,
> Where should he find it fairer than in Blanch?
> If zealous love should go in search of virtue,
> Where should he find it purer than in Blanch?
> If love ambitious sought a match of birth,
> Whose veins bound richer blood than lady Blanch?
> Such as she is, in beauty, virtue, birth,
> Is the young dauphin every way complete:
> If not complete, O say he is not she;
> And she again wants nothing, to name want,
> If want it be not, that she is not he.
> He is the half part of a blessed man,
> Left to be finished by such as she;

And she a fair divided excellence,
Whose fulness of perfection lies in him.
O, two such silver currents, when they join,
Do glorify the banks that bound them in :
And two such shores to two such streams made one,
Two such controuling bounds, shall you be, kings,
To these two princes, if you marry them."

Another instance, which is certainly very happy as an example of the simple enumeration of a number of particulars, is Salisbury's remonstrance against the second crowning of the king.

"Therefore to be possessed with double pomp,
To guard a title that was rich before ;
To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, to add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper light
To seek the beauteous eye of heav'n to garnish ;
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."

TWELFTH NIGHT ; OR, WHAT YOU WILL

This is justly considered as one of the most delightful of Shakespear's comedies. It is full of sweetness and pleasantry. It is perhaps too good-natured for comedy. It has little satire, and no spleen. It aims at the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous. It makes us laugh at the follies of mankind, not despise them, and still less bear any ill-will towards them. Shakespear's comic genius resembles the bee rather in its power of extracting sweets from weeds or poisons, than in leaving a sting behind it. He gives the most amusing exaggeration of the prevailing foibles of his characters, but in a way that they themselves, instead of being offended at, would almost join in to humour ; he rather contrives opportunities for them to shew themselves off in the happiest lights, than renders them contemptible in the perverse construction of the wit

or malice of others.—There is a certain stage of society in which people become conscious of their peculiarities and absurdities, affect to disguise what they are, and set up pretensions to what they are not. This gives rise to a corresponding style of comedy, the object of which is to detect the disguises of self-love, and to make reprisals on these preposterous assumptions of vanity, by marking the contrast between the real and the affected character as severely as possible, and denying to those, who would impose on us for what they are not, even the merit which they have. This is the comedy of artificial life, of wit and satire, such as we see it in Congreve, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, &c. To this succeeds a state of society from which the same sort of affectation and pretence are banished by a greater knowledge of the world or by their successful exposure on the stage; and which by neutralising the materials of comic character, both natural and artificial, leaves no comedy at all—but *the sentimental*. Such is our modern comedy. There is a period in the progress of manners anterior to both these, in which the foibles and follies of individuals are of nature's planting, not the growth of art or study; in which they are therefore unconscious of them themselves, or care not who knows them, if they can but have their whim out; and in which, as there is no attempt at imposition, the spectators rather receive pleasure from humouring the inclinations of the persons they laugh at, than wish to give them pain by exposing their absurdity. This may be called the comedy of nature, and it is the comedy which we generally find in Shakespear.—Whether the analysis here given be just or not, the spirit of his comedies is evidently quite distinct from that of the authors above mentioned, as it is in its essence the same with that of Cervantes, and also very frequently of Moliere, though he was more systematic in his extravagance than Shakespear. Shakespear's comedy is of a pastoral and poetical cast. Folly is indigenous to the soil, and shoots out with native, happy, unchecked luxuriance. Absurdity has every encouragement afforded it; and nonsense has room to flourish in. Nothing is

stunted by the churlish, icy hand of indifference or severity. The poet runs riot in a conceit, and idolises a quibble. His whole object is to turn the meanest or rudest objects to a pleasurable account. The relish which he has of a pun, or of the quaint humour of a low character, does not interfere with the delight with which he describes a beautiful image, or the most refined love. The clown's forced jests do not spoil the sweetness of the character of Viola; the same house is big enough to hold Malvolio, the Countess, Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew Ague-cheek. For instance, nothing can fall much lower than this last character in intellect or morals: yet how are his weaknesses nursed and dandled by Sir Toby into something "high fantastical," when on Sir Andrew's commendation of himself for dancing and fencing, Sir Toby answers — "Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before them? Are they like to take dust like mistress Moll's picture? Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard, and come home in a coranto? My very walk should be a jig! I would not so much as make water but in a cinque-pace. What dost thou mean? Is this a world to hide virtues in? I did think by the excellent constitution of thy leg, it was framed under the star of a galliard!"—How Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and the Clown afterwards *chirp over their cups*, how they "rouse the night-owl in a catch, able to draw three souls out of one weaver!" What can be better than Sir Toby's unanswerable answer to Malvolio, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"—In a word, the best turn is given to every thing, instead of the worst. There is a constant infusion of the romantic and enthusiastic, in proportion as the characters are natural and sincere: whereas, in the more artificial style of comedy, every thing gives way to ridicule and indifference, there being nothing left but affectation on one side, and incredulity on the other.—Much as we like Shakespear's comedies, we cannot agree with Dr. Johnson that they are better than his tragedies; nor do we like them half so well. If his inclination to

comedy sometimes led him to trifle with the seriousness of tragedy, the poetical and impassioned passages are the best parts of his comedies. The great and secret charm of TWELFTH NIGHT is the character of Viola. Much as we like catches and cakes and ale, there is something that we like better. We have a friendship for Sir Toby; we patronise Sir Andrew; we have an understanding with the Clown, a sneaking kindness for Maria and her rogueries; we feel a regard for Malvolio, and sympathise with his gravity, his smiles, his cross garters, his yellow stockings, and imprisonment in the stocks. But there is something that excites in us a stronger feeling than all this—it is Viola's confession of her love.

> "*Duke.* What's her history?
> *Viola. A blank, my lord, she never told her love:*
> She let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy,
> She sat like Patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief. *Was not this love indeed?*
> We men may say more, swear more, but indeed,
> Our shews are more than will; for still we prove
> Much in our vows, but little in our love.
> *Duke.* But died thy sister of her love, my boy?
> *Viola.* I am all the daughters of my father's house,
> And all the brothers too;—and yet I know not."—

Shakespear alone could describe the effect of his own poetry.

> "Oh, it came o'er the ear like the sweet south
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour."

What we so much admire here is not the image of Patience on a monument, which has been generally quoted, but the lines before and after it. "They give a very echo to the seat where love is throned." How long ago it is since we first learnt to repeat them; and still, still they vibrate on the heart, like the sounds which the passing wind draws from the trembling strings of a harp left on some desert shore! There are other passages of not less impassioned sweetness. Such is Olivia's address to Sebastian, whom

she supposes to have already deceived her in a promise of marriage.

"Blame not this haste of mind: if you mean well,
Now go with me and with this holy man
Into the chantry by: there before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace."

We have already said something of Shakespear's songs. One of the most beautiful of them occurs in this play, with a preface of his own to it.

"*Duke.* O fellow, come, the song we had last night.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,
Do use to chaunt it: it is silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love,
Like the old age.

SONG.

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O prepare it;
My part of death no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strewn;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown:
A thousand thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O! where
Sad true-love never find my grave,
To weep there."

Who after this will say that Shakespear's genius was only fitted for comedy? Yet after reading other parts of this play, and particularly the garden-scene where Malvolio picks up the letter, if we were to say that his genius for comedy was less than his genius for tragedy, it would

perhaps only prove that our own taste in such matters is more saturnine than mercurial.

"*Enter* MARIA.

Sir Toby. Here comes the little villain :—How now, my nettle of India ?

Maria. Get ye all three into the box-tree : Malvolio's coming down this walk : he has been yonder i' the sun, practising behaviour to his own shadow this half hour : observe him, for the love of mockery ; for I know this letter will make a contemplative idiot of him. Close, in the name of jesting ! Lie thou there ; for here come's the trout that must be caught with tickling.

[*They hide themselves. Maria throws down a letter, and Exit.*

Enter MALVOLIO.

Malvolio. 'Tis but fortune ; all is fortune. Maria once told me, she did affect me ; and I have heard herself come thus near, that, should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion. Besides, she uses me with a more exalted respect than any one else that follows her. What should I think on't ?

Sir Toby. Here's an over-weening rogue !

Fabian. O, peace ! Contemplation makes a rare turkey-cock of him ; how he jets under his advanced plumes !

Sir Andrew. 'Slight, I could so beat the rogue :—

Sir Toby. Peace, I say.

Malvolio. To be count Malvolio ;—

Sir Toby. Ah, rogue !

Sir Andrew. Pistol him, pistol him.

Sir Toby. Peace, peace !

Malvolio. There is example for't ; the lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe.

Sir Andrew. Fie on him, Jezebel !

Fabian. O, peace ! now he's deeply in ; look, how imagination blows him.

Malvolio. Having been three months married to her, sitting in my chair of state,——

Sir Toby. O for a stone bow, to hit him in the eye !

Malvolio. Calling my officers about me, in my branch'd velvet gown ; having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping.

Sir Toby. Fire and brimstone !

Fabian. O peace, peace !

Malvolio. And then to have the humour of state : and after a demure travel of regard,——telling them, I know my place, as I would they should do theirs,—to ask for my kinsman Toby.——

Sir Toby. Bolts and shackles !

Fabian. O, peace, peace, peace ! now, now.

Malvolio. Seven of my people, with an obedient start, make out for him ; I frown the while ; and, perchance, wind up my watch, or play with some rich jewel. Toby approaches ; curtsies there to me.

Sir Toby. Shall this fellow live?

Fabian. Though our silence be drawn from us with cares, yet peace.

Malvolio. I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard to controul.

Sir Toby. And does not Toby take you a blow o' the lips then?

Malvolio. Saying—Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of speech;—

Sir Toby. What, what?

Malvolio. You must amend your drunkenness.

Fabian. Nay, patience, or we break the sinews of our plot.

Malvolio. Besides, you waste the treasure of your time with a foolish knight—

Sir Andrew. That's me, I warrant you.

Malvolio. One Sir Andrew——

Sir Andrew. I knew, 'twas I; for many do call me fool.

Malvolio. What employment have we here?

[*Taking up the letter.*"

The letter and his comments on it are equally good. If poor Malvolio's treatment afterwards is a little hard, poetical justice is done in the uneasiness which Olivia suffers on account of her mistaken attachment to Cesario, as her insensibility to the violence of the Duke's passion is atoned for by the discovery of Viola's concealed love of him.

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

This is little more than the first outlines of a comedy loosely sketched in. It is the story of a novel dramatised with very little labour or pretension; yet there are passages of high poetical spirit, and of inimitable quaintness of humour, which are undoubtedly Shakespear's, and there is throughout the conduct of the fable a careless grace and felicity which marks it for his. One of the editors (we believe Mr. Pope) remarks in a marginal note to the Two Gentlemen of Verona—"It is observable (I know not for what cause) that the style of this comedy is less figurative, and more natural and unaffected than the greater part of this author's, though supposed to be one of

the first he wrote." Yet so little does the editor appear to have made up his mind upon this subject, that we find the following note to the very next (the second) scene. "This whole scene, like many others in these plays (some of which I believe were written by Shakespear, and others interpolated by the players) is composed of the lowest and most trifling conceits, to be accounted for only by the gross taste of the age he lived in: *Populo ut placerent.* I wish I had authority to leave them out, but I have done all I could, set a mark of reprobation upon them, throughout this edition." It is strange that our fastidious critic should fall so soon from praising to reprobating. The style of the familiar parts of this comedy is indeed made up of conceits —low they may be for what we know, but then they are not poor, but rich ones. The scene of Launce with his dog (not that in the second, but that in the fourth act) is a perfect treat in the way of farcical drollery and invention; nor do we think Speed's manner of proving his master to be in love deficient in wit or sense, though the style may be criticised as not simple enough for the modern taste.

"*Valentine.* Why, how know you that I am in love?

Speed. Marry, by these special marks: first, you have learned, like Sir Protheus, to wreathe your arms like a malcontent, to relish a love-song like a robin-red-breast, to walk alone like one that had the pestilence, to sigh like a school-boy that had lost his ABC, to weep like a young wench that had buried her grandam, to fast like one that takes diet, to watch like one that fears robbing, to speak puling like a beggar at Hallowmas. You were wont, when you laughed, to crow like a cock; when you walked, to walk like one of the lions; when you fasted, it was presently after dinner; when you looked sadly, it was for want of money; and now you are metamorphosed with a mistress, that when I look on you, I can hardly think you my master."

The tender scenes in this play, though not so highly wrought as in some others, have often much sweetness of sentiment and expression. There is something pretty and playful in the conversation of Julia with her maid, when she shews such a disposition to coquetry about receiving the letter from Protheus; and her behaviour afterwards and her disappointment, when she finds him faithless to his vows, remind us at a distance of Imogen's tender

constancy. Her answer to Lucetta, who advises her against following her lover in disguise, is a beautiful piece of poetry.

"*Lucetta.* I do not seek to quench your love's hot fire,
But qualify the fire's extremest rage,
Lest it should burn above the bounds of reason.
Julia. The more thou damm'st it up, the more it burns ;
The current that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou know'st, being stopp'd, impatiently doth rage ;
But when his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with th' enamell'd stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage :
And so by many winding nooks he strays,
With willing sport, to the wild ocean. [1]
Then let me go, and hinder not my course ;
I'll be as patient as a gentle stream,
And make a pastime of each weary step,
Till the last step have brought me to my love ;
And there I'll rest, as after much turmoil,
A blessed soul doth in Elysium."

If Shakespear indeed had written only this and other passages in the TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA, he would *almost* have deserved Milton's praise of him—

"And sweetest Shakespear, Fancy's child,
Warbles his native wood-notes wild."

But as it is, he deserves rather more praise than this.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

THIS is a play that in spite of the change of manners and prejudices still holds undisputed possession of the stage. Shakespear's malignant has outlived Mr. Cumberland's benevolent Jew. In proportion as Shylock has ceased to be a popular bugbear, "baited with the rabble's curse,"

[1] The river wanders at its own sweet will.
WORDSWORTH.

he becomes a half-favourite with the philosophical part of the audience, who are disposed to think that Jewish revenge is at least as good as Christian injuries. Shylock is *a good hater;* "a man no less sinned against than sinning." If he carries his revenge too far, yet he has strong grounds for "the lodged hate he bears Anthonio," which he explains with equal force of eloquence and reason. He seems the depositary of the vengeance of his race; and though the long habit of brooding over daily insults and injuries has crusted over his temper with inveterate misanthropy, and hardened him against the contempt of mankind, this adds but little to the triumphant pretensions of his enemies. There is a strong, quick, and deep sense of justice mixed up with the gall and bitterness of his resentment. The constant apprehension of being burnt alive, plundered, banished, reviled, and trampled on, might be supposed to sour the most forbearing nature, and to take something from that "milk of human kindness," with which his persecutors contemplated his indignities. The desire of revenge is almost inseparable from the sense of wrong; and we can hardly help sympathising with the proud spirit, hid beneath his "Jewish gaberdine," stung to madness by repeated undeserved provocations, and labouring to throw off the load of obloquy and oppression heaped upon him and all his tribe by one desperate act of "lawful" revenge, till the ferociousness of the means by which he is to execute his purpose, and the pertinacity with which he adheres to it, turn us against him; but even at last, when disappointed of the sanguinary revenge with which he had glutted his hopes, and exposed to beggary and contempt by the letter of the law on which he had insisted with so little remorse, we pity him, and think him hardly dealt with by his judges. In all his answers and retorts upon his adversaries, he has the best not only of the argument but of the question, reasoning on their own principles and practice. They are so far from allowing of any measure of equal dealing, of common justice or humanity between themselves and the Jew, that even when they come to ask a favour of him,

and Shylock reminds them that "on such a day they spit upon him, another spurned him, another called him dog, and for these curtesies request he'll lend them so much monies"—Anthonio, his old enemy, instead of any acknowledgment of the shrewdness and justice of his remonstrance, which would have been preposterous in a respectable Catholic merchant in those times, threatens him with a repetition of the same treatment—

> "I am as like to call thee so again,
> To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too."

After this, the appeal to the Jew's mercy, as if there were any common principle of right and wrong between them, is the rankest hypocrisy, or the blindest prejudice; and the Jew's answer to one of Anthonio's friends, who asks him what his pound of forfeit flesh is good for, is irresistible—

> "To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgrac'd me, and hinder'd me of half a million, laughed at my losses, mock'd at my gains, scorn'd my nation, thwarted my bargains, cool'd my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes; hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer that a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? why revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."

The whole of the trial-scene, both before and after the entrance of Portia, is a master-piece of dramatic skill. The legal acuteness, the passionate declamations, the sound maxims of jurisprudence, the wit and irony interspersed in it, the fluctuations of hope and fear in the different persons, and the completeness and suddenness of the catastrophe, cannot be surpassed. Shylock, who is his own counsel, defends himself well, and is triumphant on all the general topics that are urged against

him, and only fails through a legal flaw. Take the following as an instance :—

> " *Shylock.* What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong ?
> You have among you many a purchas'd slave,
> Which like your asses, and your dogs, and mules,
> You use in abject and in slavish part,
> Because you bought them :—shall I say to you,
> Let them be free, marry them to your heirs ?
> Why sweat they under burdens ? let their beds
> Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates
> Be season'd with such viands ? you will answer,
> The slaves are ours :—so do I answer you :
> The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,
> Is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it :
> If you deny me, fie upon your law !
> There is no force in the decrees of Venice :
> I stand for judgment : answer ; shall I have it ?"

The keenness of his revenge awakes all his faculties ; and he beats back all opposition to his purpose, whether grave or gay, whether of wit or argument, with an equal degree of earnestness and self-possession. His character is displayed as distinctly in other less prominent parts of the play, and we may collect from a few sentences the history of his life—his descent and origin, his thrift and domestic economy, his affection for his daughter, whom he loves next to his wealth, his courtship and his first present to Leah, his wife ! " I would not have parted with it" (the ring which he first gave her) "for a wilderness of monkies !" What a fine Hebraism is implied in this expression !

Portia is not a very great favourite with us ; neither are we in love with her maid, Nerissa. Portia has a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her, which is very unusual in Shakespear's women, but which perhaps was a proper qualification for the office of a "civil doctor," which she undertakes and executes so successfully. The speech about Mercy is very well ; but there are a thousand finer ones in Shakespear. We do not admire the scene of the caskets : and object entirely to the Black Prince, Morocchius. We should like Jessica better if she had not deceived and robbed

her father, and Lorenzo, if he had not married a Jewess, though he thinks he has a right to wrong a Jew. The dialogue between this newly-married couple by moonlight, beginning "On such a night," &c. is a collection of classical elegancies. Launcelot, the Jew's man, is an honest fellow. The dilemma in which he describes himself placed between his "conscience and the fiend," the one of which advises him to run away from his master's service and the other to stay in it, is exquisitely humourous.

Gratiano is a very admirable subordinate character. He is the jester of the piece: yet one speech of his, in his own defence, contains a whole volume of wisdom.

> "*Anthonio.* I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano,
> A stage, where every one must play his part;
> And mine a sad one.
> *Gratiano.* Let me play the fool:
> With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come:
> And let my liver rather heat with wine,
> Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
> Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
> Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
> Sleep when he wakes? and creep into the jaundice
> By being peevish? I tell thee what, Anthonio—
> I love thee, and it is my love that speaks;—
> There are a sort of men, whose visages
> Do cream and mantle like a standing pond:
> And do a wilful stillness entertain,
> With purpose to be drest in an opinion
> Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit;
> As who should say, *I am Sir Oracle,*
> *And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!*
> O, my Anthonio, I do know of these,
> That therefore only are reputed wise,
> For saying nothing; who, I am very sure,
> If they should speak, would almost damn those ears,
> Which hearing them, would call their brothers, fools.
> I'll tell thee more of this another time:
> But fish not with this melancholy bait,
> For this fool's gudgeon, this opinion."

Gratiano's speech on the philosophy of love, and the effect of habit in taking off the force of passion, is as full of spirit and good sense. The graceful winding up

of this play in the fifth act, after the tragic business is despatched, is one of the happiest instances of Shakespear's knowledge of the principles of the drama. We do not mean the pretended quarrel between Portia and Nerissa and their husbands about the rings, which is amusing enough, but the conversation just before and after the return of Portia to her own house, beginning "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank," and ending "Peace! how the moon sleeps with Endymion, and would not be awaked." There is a number of beautiful thoughts crowded into that short space, and linked together by the most natural transitions.

When we first went to see Mr. Kean in Shylock, we expected to see, what we had been used to see, a decrepid old man, bent with age and ugly with mental deformity, grinning with deadly malice, with the venom of his heart congealed in the expression of his countenance, sullen, morose, gloomy, inflexible, brooding over one idea, that of his hatred, and fixed on one unalterable purpose, that of his revenge. We were disappointed, because we had taken our idea from other actors, not from the play. There is no proof there that Shylock is old, but a single line, "Bassanio and *old* Shylock, both stand forth,"—which does not imply that he is infirm with age—and the circumstance that he has a daughter marriageable, which does not imply that he is old at all. It would be too much to say that his body should be made crooked and deformed to answer to his mind, which is bowed down and warped with prejudices and passion. That he has but one idea, is not true; he has more ideas than any other person in the piece; and if he is intense and inveterate in the pursuit of his purpose, he shews the utmost elasticity, vigour, and presence of mind, in the means of attaining it. But so rooted was our habitual impression of the part from seeing it caricatured in the representation, that it was only from a careful perusal of the play itself that we saw our error. The stage is not in general the best place to study our author's characters in. It is too

often filled with traditional common-place conceptions of the part, handed down from sire to son, and suited to the taste of *the great vulgar and the small*.—"'Tis an unweeded garden: things rank and gross do merely gender in it!" If a man of genius comes once in an age to clear away the rubbish, to make it fruitful and wholesome, they cry, "'Tis a bad school: it may be like nature, it may be like Shakespear, but it is not like us." Admirable critics!

THE WINTER'S TALE

We wonder that Mr. Pope should have entertained doubts of the genuineness of this play. He was, we suppose, shocked (as a certain critic suggests) at the Chorus, Time, leaping over sixteen years with his crutch between the third and fourth act, and at Antigonus's landing with the infant Perdita on the sea-coast of Bohemia. These slips or blemishes however do not prove it not to be Shakespear's; for he was as likely to fall into them as any body; but we do not know any body but himself who could produce the beauties. The *stuff* of which the tragic passion is composed, the romantic sweetness, the comic humour, are evidently his. Even the crabbed and tortuous style of the speeches of Leontes, reasoning on his own jealousy, beset with doubts and fears, and entangled more and more in the thorny labyrinth, bears every mark of Shakespear's peculiar manner of conveying the painful struggle of different thoughts and feelings, labouring for utterance, and almost strangled in the birth. For instance:—

> "Ha' not you seen, Camillo?
> (But that's past doubt; you have, or your eye-glass
> Is thicker than a cuckold's horn) or heard,
> (For to a vision so apparent, rumour
> Cannot be mute) or thought (for cogitation
> Resides not within man that does not think it)

> My wife is slippery ? If thou wilt, confess,
> Or else be impudently negative,
> To have nor eyes, nor ears, nor thought."—

Here Leontes is confounded with his passion, and does not know which way to turn himself, to give words to the anguish, rage, and apprehension, which tug at his breast. It is only as he is worked up into a clearer conviction of his wrongs by insisting on the grounds of his unjust suspicions to Camillo, who irritates him by his opposition, that he bursts out into the following vehement strain of bitter indignation : yet even here his passion staggers, and is as it were oppressed with its own intensity.

> "Is whispering nothing ?
> Is leaning cheek to cheek ? is meeting noses ?
> Kissing with inside lip ? stopping the career
> Of laughter with a sigh ? (a note infallible
> Of breaking honesty !) horsing foot on foot ?
> Skulking in corners ? wishing clocks more swift ?
> Hours, minutes ? the noon, midnight ? and all eyes
> Blind with the pin and web, but theirs ; theirs only,
> That would, unseen, be wicked ? is this nothing ?
> Why then the world, and all that's in't, is nothing,
> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia's nothing,
> My wife is nothing ! "

The character of Hermione is as much distinguished by its saint-like resignation and patient forbearance, as that of Paulina is by her zealous and spirited remonstrances against the injustice done to the queen, and by her devoted attachment to her misfortunes. Hermione's restoration to her husband and her child, after her long separation from them, is as affecting in itself as it is striking in the representation. Camillo, and the old shepherd and his son, are subordinate but not uninteresting instruments in the developement of the plot, and though last, not least, comes Autolycus, a very pleasant, thriving rogue ; and (what is the best feather in the cap of all knavery) he escapes with impunity in the end.

The Winter's Tale is one of the best-acting of our author's plays. We remember seeing it with great

pleasure many years ago. It was on the night that King took leave of the stage, when he and Mrs. Jordan played together in the after-piece of the *Wedding-day*. Nothing could go off with more *éclat*, with more spirit, and grandeur of effect. Mrs. Siddons played Hermione, and in the last scene acted the painted statue to the life—with true monumental dignity and noble passion; Mr. Kemble, in Leontes, worked himself up into a very fine classical phrensy; and Bannister, as Autolycus, roared as loud for pity as a sturdy beggar could do who felt none of the pain he counterfeited, and was sound of wind and limb. We shall never see these parts so acted again; or if we did, it would be in vain. Actors grow old, or no longer surprise us by their novelty. But true poetry, like nature, is always young; and we still read the courtship of Florizel and Perdita, as we welcome the return of spring, with the same feelings as ever.

"*Florizel.* Thou dearest Perdita,
When these forc'd thoughts, I pr'ythee, darken not
The mirth o'the feast: or, I'll be thine, my fair,
Or not my father's: for I cannot be
Mine own, nor any thing to any, if
I be not thine. To this I am most constant,
Tho' destiny say, No. Be merry, gentle;
Strangle such thoughts as these, with any thing
That you behold the while. Your guests are coming:
Lift up your countenance; as it were the day
Of celebration of that nuptial, which
We two have sworn shall come.
Perdita. O lady fortune,
Stand you auspicious!

Enter Shepherd, Clown, MOPSA, DORCAS, *Servants; with* POLIXENES, *and* CAMILLO, *disguised.*

Florizel. See, your guests approach.
Address yourself to entertain them sprightly,
And let's be red with mirth.
Shepherd. Fie, daughter! when my old wife liv'd, upon
This day, she was both pantler, butler, cook;
Both dame and servant: welcom'd all, serv'd all:
Would sing her song, and dance her turn: now here
At upper end o' the table, now i' the middle:
On his shoulder, and his: her face o' fire
With labour; and the thing she took to quench it

She would to each one sip. You are retir'd,
As if you were a feasted one, and not
The hostess of the meeting. Pray you, bid
These unknown friends to us welcome; for it is
A way to make us better friends, more known.
Come, quench your blushes; and present yourself
That which you are, mistress o' the feast. Come on,
And bid us welcome to your sheep-shearing,
As your good flock shall prosper.
Perdita. Sir, welcome! [*To Polixenes and Camillo.*
It is my father's will I should take on me
The hostess-ship o' the day: you're welcome, sir!
Give me those flowers there, Dorcas.—Reverend sirs,
For you there's rosemary and rue; these keep
Seeming, and savour, all the winter long:
Grace and remembrance be unto you both,
And welcome to our shearing!
Polixenes. Shepherdess,
(A fair one are you) well you fit our ages
With flowers of winter.
Perdita. Sir, the year growing ancient,
Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter, the fairest flowers o' the season
Are our carnations, and streak'd gilly-flowers,
Which some call nature's bastards: of that kind
Our rustic garden's barren; and I care not
To get slips of them.
Polixenes. Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?
Perdita. For I have heard it said
There is an art, which, in their piedness, shares
With great creating nature.
Polixenes. Say, there be:
Yet nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean: so, o'er that art
Which you say, adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scyon to the wildest stock;
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather: but
The art itself is nature.
Perdita. So it is.[1]
Polixenes. Then make your garden rich in gilly-flowers,
And do not call them bastards.
Perdita. I'll not put
The dibble in earth, to set one slip of them;[1]

[1] The lady, we here see, gives up the argument, but keeps her mind.

No more than, were I painted, I would wish
This youth should say, 'twere well ; and only therefore
Desire to breed by me.—Here's flowers for you ;
Hot lavender, mints, savoury, marjoram ;
The marigold, that goes to bed with the sun,
And with him rises, weeping : these are flowers
Of middle summer, and, I think, they are given
To men of middle age. You are very welcome.
Camillo. I should leave grazing, were I of your flock,
And only live by gazing.
Perdita. Out, alas !
You'd be so lean, that blasts of January
Would blow you through and through. Now my fairest friends,
I would I had some flowers o' the spring, that might
Become your time of day ; and your's, and your's,
That wear upon your virgin branches yet
Your maiden-heads growing : O Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon ! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty : violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath ; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength (a malady
Most incident to maids) ; bold oxlips, and
The crown-imperial ; lilies of all kinds,
The fleur-de-lis being one ! O, these I lack
To make you garlands of ; and my sweet friend
To strow him o'er and o'er.
Florizel. What, like a corse ?
Perdita. No, like a bank, for love to lie and play on ;
Not like a corse ; or if—not to be buried,
But quick, and in mine arms. Come take your flowers ;
Methinks, I play as I have seen them do
In Whitsun pastorals : sure this robe of mine
Does change my disposition.
Florizel. What you do,
Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,
I'd have you do it ever : when you sing,
I'd have you buy and sell so ; so, give alms ;
Pray, so ; and for the ordering your affairs,
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that : move still, still so,
And own no other function. Each your doing,
So singular in each particular,
Crowns what you're doing in the present deeds,
That all your acts are queens.

Perdita. O Doricles,
Your praises are too large ; but that your youth
And the true blood, which peeps forth fairly through it,
Do plainly give you out an unstained shepherd ;
With wisdom I might fear, my Doricles,
You woo'd me the false way.
Florizel. I think you have
As little skill to fear, as I have purpose
To put you to't. But come, our dance, I pray :
Your hand, my Perdita : so turtles pair,
That never mean to part.
Perdita. I'll swear for 'em.
Polixenes. This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the green-sward ; nothing she does, or seems,
But smacks of something greater than herself,
Too noble for this place.
Camillo. He tells her something
That makes her blood look out : good sooth she is
The queen of curds and cream."

This delicious scene is interrupted by the father of the prince discovering himself to Florizel, and haughtily breaking off the intended match between his son and Perdita. When Polixenes goes out, Perdita says,

"Even here undone :
I was not much afraid ; for once or twice
I was about to speak ; and tell him plainly,
The self-same sun that shines upon his court,
Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
Looks on't alike. Wilt please you, sir, be gone ?
[*To Florizel.*
I told you what would come of this. Beseech you,
Of your own state take care: this dream of mine,
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,
But milk my ewes and weep."

As Perdita, the supposed shepherdess, turns out to be the daughter of Hermione, and a princess in disguise, both feelings of the pride of birth and the claims of nature are satisfied by the fortunate events of the story, and the fine romance of poetry is reconciled to the strictest court-etiquette.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

All's Well that Ends Well is one of the most pleasing of our author's comedies. The interest is however more of a serious than of a comic nature. The character of Helen is one of great sweetness and delicacy. She is placed in circumstances of the most critical kind, and has to court her husband both as a virgin and a wife: yet the most scrupulous nicety of female modesty is not once violated. There is not one thought or action that ought to bring a blush into her cheeks, or that for a moment lessens her in our esteem. Perhaps the romantic attachment of a beautiful and virtuous girl to one placed above her hopes by the circumstances of birth and fortune, was never so exquisitely expressed as in the reflections which she utters when young Roussillon leaves his mother's house, under whose protection she has been brought up with him, to repair to the French king's court.

"*Helena.* Oh, were that all—I think not on my father,
And these great tears grace his remembrance more
Than those I shed for him. What was he like?
I have forgot him. My imagination
Carries no favour in it, but Bertram's.
I am undone, there is no living, none
If Bertram be away. It were all one
That I should love a bright particular star,
And think to wed it; he is so above me:
In his bright radiance and collateral light
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
Th' ambition in my love thus plagues itself;
The hind that would be mated by the lion,
Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, tho' a plague,
To see him every hour, to sit and draw
His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls
In our heart's table: heart too capable
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour.
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy
Must sanctify his relics."

The interest excited by this beautiful picture of a fond and innocent heart is kept up afterwards by her resolution

to follow him to France, the success of her experiment in restoring the king's health, her demanding Bertram in marriage as a recompense, his leaving her in disdain, her interview with him afterwards disguised as Diana, a young lady whom he importunes with his secret addresses, and their final reconciliation when the consequences of her stratagem and the proofs of her love are fully made known. The persevering gratitude of the French king to his benefactress, who cures him of a languishing distemper by a prescription hereditary in her family, the indulgent kindness of the Countess, whose pride of birth yields, almost without a struggle, to her affection for Helen, the honesty and uprightness of the good old lord Lafeu, make very interesting parts of the picture. The wilful stubbornness and youthful petulance of Bertram are also very admirably described. The comic part of the play turns on the folly, boasting, and cowardice of Parolles, a parasite and hanger-on of Bertram's, the detection of whose false pretensions to bravery and honour forms a very amusing episode. He is first found out by the old lord Lafeu, who says, "The soul of this man is in his clothes;" and it is proved afterwards that his heart is in his tongue, and that both are false and hollow. The adventure of "the bringing off of his drum" has become proverbial as a satire on all ridiculous and blustering undertakings which the person never means to perform: nor can any thing be more severe than what one of the bye-standers remarks upon what Parolles says of himself, "Is it possible he should know what he is, and be that he is?" Yet Parolles himself gives the best solution of the difficulty afterwards when he is thankful to escape with his life and the loss of character; for, so that he can live on, he is by no means squeamish about the loss of pretensions, to which he had sense enough to know he had no real claim, and which he had assumed only as a means to live.

"*Parolles.* Yet I am thankful: if my heart were great,
'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more,
But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft
As captain shall. Simply the thing I am
Shall make me live: who knows himself a braggart,

Let him fear this ; for it shall come to pass,
That every braggart shall be found an ass.
Rust sword, cool blushes, and Parolles live
Safest in shame ; being fool'd, by fool'ry thrive ;
There's place and means for every man alive.
I'll after them."

The story of ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, and of several others of Shakespear's plays, is taken from Boccacio. The poet has dramatised the original novel with great skill and comic spirit, and has preserved all the beauty of character and sentiment without *improving upon* it, which was impossible. There is indeed in Boccacio's serious pieces a truth, a pathos, and an exquisite refinement of sentiment, which is hardly to be met with in any other prose writer whatever. Justice has not been done him by the world. He has in general passed for a mere narrator of lascivious tales or idle jests. This character probably originated in his obnoxious attacks on the monks, and has been kept up by the grossness of mankind, who revenged their own want of refinement on Boccacio, and only saw in his writings what suited the coarseness of their own tastes. But the truth is, that he has carried sentiment of every kind to its very highest purity and perfection. By sentiment we would here understand the habitual working of some one powerful feeling, where the heart reposes almost entirely upon itself, without the violent excitement of opposing duties or untoward circumstances. In this way, nothing ever came up to the story of Frederigo Alberigi and his Falcon. The perseverance in attachment, the spirit of gallantry and generosity displayed in it, has no parallel in the history of heroical sacrifices. The feeling is so unconscious too, and involuntary, is brought out in such small, unlooked-for, and unostentatious circumstances, as to show it to have been woven into the very nature and soul of the author. The story of Isabella is scarcely less fine, and is more affecting in the circumstances and in the catastrophe. Dryden has done justice to the impassioned eloquence of the Tancred and Sigismunda ; but has not given an adequate idea of the wild preternatural interest of the story of Honoria.

Cimon and Iphigene is by no means one of the best, notwithstanding the popularity of the subject. The proof of unalterable affection given in the story of Jeronymo, and the simple touches of nature and picturesque beauty in the story of the two holiday lovers, who were poisoned by tasting of a leaf in the garden at Florence, are perfect master-pieces. The epithet of Divine was well bestowed on this great painter of the human heart. The invention implied in his different tales is immense: but we are not to infer that it is all his own. He probably availed himself of all the common traditions which were floating in his time, and which he was the first to appropriate. Homer appears the most original of all authors—probably for no other reason than that we can trace the plagiarism no farther. Boccacio has furnished subjects to numberless writers since his time, both dramatic and narrative. The story of Griselda is borrowed from his Decameron by Chaucer; as is the Knight's Tale (Palamon and Arcite) from his poem of the Theseid.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST

If we were to part with any of the author's comedies, it should be this. Yet we should be loth to part with Don Adriano de Armado, that mighty potentate of nonsense, or his page, that handful of wit; with Nathaniel the curate, or Holofernes the school-master, and their dispute after dinner on "the golden cadences of poesy;" with Costard the clown, or Dull the constable. Biron is too accomplished a character to be lost to the world, and yet he could not appear without his fellow courtiers and the king: and if we were to leave out the ladies the gentlemen would have no mistresses. So that we believe we may let the whole play stand as it is, and we shall hardly venture to "set a mark of reprobation on it." Still we have some objections to the style, which we think savours

more of the pedantic spirit of Shakespear's time than of his own genius; more of controversial divinity, and the logic of Peter Lombard, than of the inspiration of the Muse. It transports us quite as much to the manners of the court, and the quirks of courts of law, as to the scenes of nature or the fairy-land of his own imagination. Shakespear has set himself to imitate the tone of polite conversation then prevailing among the fair, the witty, and the learned, and he has imitated it but too faithfully. It is as if the hand of Titian had been employed to give grace to the curls of a full-bottomed periwig, or Raphael had attempted to give expression to the tapestry figures in the House of Lords. Shakespear has put an excellent description of this fashionable jargon into the mouth of the critical Holofernes "as too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd, as it were, too peregrinate, as I may call it;" and nothing can be more marked than the difference when he breaks loose from the trammels he had imposed on himself, "as light as bird from brake," and speaks in his own person. We think, for instance, that in the following soliloquy the poet has fairly got the start of Queen Elizabeth and her maids of honour:—

"*Biron.* O! and I forsooth in love,
I that have been love's whip;
A very beadle to an amorous sigh:
A critic; nay, a night-watch constable,
A domineering pedant o'er the boy,
Than whom no mortal more magnificent.
This wimpled, whining, purblind, wayward boy,
This signior Junio, giant dwarf, Dan Cupid,
Regent of love-rhymes, lord of folded arms,
Th' anointed sovereign of sighs and groans:
Liege of all loiterers and malecontents,
Dread prince of plackets, king of codpieces,
Sole imperator, and great general
Of trotting parators (O my little heart!)
And I to be a corporal of his field,
And wear his colours like a tumbler's hoop!
What? I love! I sue! I seek a wife!
A woman, that is like a German clock,
Still a repairing; ever out of frame;
And never going aright, being a watch,
And being watch'd, that it may still go right?

Nay, to be perjur'd, which is worst of all :
And among three to love the worst of all,
A whitely wanton with a velvet brow,
With two pitch balls stuck in her face for eyes ;
Ay, and by heav'n, one that will do the deed,
Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard ;
And I to sigh for her ! to watch for her !
To pray for her ! Go to ; it is a plague
That Cupid will impose for my neglect
Of his almighty dreadful little might.
Well, I will love, write, sigh, pray, sue, and groan :
Some men must love my lady, and some Joan."

The character of Biron drawn by Rosaline and that which Biron gives of Boyet are equally happy. The observations on the use and abuse of study, and on the power of beauty to quicken the understanding as well as the senses, are excellent. The scene which has the greatest dramatic effect is that in which Biron, the king, Longaville, and Dumain, successively detect each other and are detected in their breach of their vow and in their profession of attachment to their several mistresses, in which they suppose themselves to be overheard by no one. The reconciliation between these lovers and their sweethearts is also very good, and the penance which Rosaline imposes on Biron, before he can expect to gain her consent to marry him, full of propriety and beauty.

" *Rosaline.* Oft have I heard of you, my lord Biron,
Before I saw you : and the world's large tongue
Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks ;
Full of comparisons, and wounding flouts ;
Which you on all estates will execute,
That lie within the mercy of your wit.
To weed this wormwood from your faithful brain ;
And therewithal to win me, if you please,
(Without the which I am not to be won)
You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick, and still converse
With groaning wretches ; and your task shall be,
With all the fierce endeavour of your wit,
T' enforce the pained impotent to smile.
Biron. To move wild laughter in the throat of death ?
It cannot be : it is impossible :
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.
Rosaline. Why, that's the way to choke a gibing spirit,
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace,

Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools :
A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it ; never in the tongue
Of him that makes it : then, if sickly ears,
Deaf'd with the clamours of their own dear groans,
Will hear your idle scorns, continue then,
And I will have you, and that fault withal ;
But, if they will not, throw away that spirit,
And I shall find you empty of that fault,
Right joyful of your reformation.
Biron. A twelvemonth ? Well, befall what will befall,
I'll jest a twelvemonth in an hospital."

The famous cuckoo-song closes the play : but we shall add no more criticisms : "the words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo."

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

This admirable comedy used to be frequently acted till of late years. Mr. Garrick's Benedick was one of his most celebrated characters ; and Mrs. Jordan, we have understood, played Beatrice very delightfully. The serious part is still the most prominent here, as in other instances that we have noticed. Hero is the principal figure in the piece, and leaves an indelible impression on the mind by her beauty, her tenderness, and the hard trial of her love. The passages in which Claudio first makes a confession of his affection towards her, conveys as pleasing an image of the entrance of love into a youthful bosom as can well be imagined.

"Oh, my lord,
When you went onward with this ended action,
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
That lik'd, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love ;
But now I am return'd, and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant ; in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
Saying, I lik'd her ere I went to wars."

In the scene at the altar, when Claudio, urged on by the villain Don John, brings the charge of incontinence against her, and as it were divorces her in the very marriage-ceremony, her appeals to her own conscious innocence and honour are made with the most affecting simplicity.

> "*Claudio.* No, Leonato,
> I never tempted her with word too large,
> But, as a brother to his sister, shew'd
> Bashful sincerity, and comely love.
> *Hero.* And seem'd I ever otherwise to you?
> *Claudio.* Out on thy seeming, I will write against it:
> You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
> As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;
> But you are more intemperate in your blood
> Than Venus, or those pamper'd animals
> That rage in savage sensuality.
> *Hero.* Is my lord well, that he doth speak so wide?
> *Leonato.* Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?
> *John.* Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.
> *Benedick.* This looks not like a nuptial.
> *Hero.* True! O God!"

The justification of Hero in the end, and her restoration to the confidence and arms of her lover, is brought about by one of those temporary consignments to the grave of which Shakespear seems to have been fond. He has perhaps explained the theory of this predilection in the following lines:—

> "*Friar.* She dying, as it must be so maintain'd,
> Upon the instant that she was accus'd,
> Shall be lamented, pity'd, and excus'd,
> Of every hearer: for it so falls out,
> That what we have we prize not to the worth,
> While we enjoy it; but being lack'd and lost,
> Why then we rack the value; then we find
> The virtue, that possession would not shew us
> Whilst it was ours.—So will it fare with Claudio;
> When he shall hear she dy'd upon his words,
> The idea of her love shall sweetly creep
> Into his study of imagination;
> And every lovely organ of her life
> Shall come apparel'd in more precious habit,
> More moving, delicate, and full of life,
> Into the eye and prospect of his soul,
> Than when she liv'd indeed."

The principal comic characters in MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, Benedick and Beatrice, are both essences in their kind. His character as a woman-hater is admirably supported, and his conversion to matrimony is no less happily effected by the pretended story of Beatrice's love for him. It is hard to say which of the two scenes is the best, that of the trick which is thus practised on Benedick, or that in which Beatrice is prevailed on to take pity on him by overhearing her cousin and her maid declare (which they do on purpose) that he is dying of love for her. There is something delightfully picturesque in the manner in which Beatrice is described as coming to hear the plot which is contrived against herself—

> "For look where Beatrice, like a lapwing, runs
> Close by the ground, to hear our conference."

In consequence of what she hears (not a word of which is true) she exclaims when these good-natured informants are gone,

> "What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
> Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?
> Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride adieu!
> No glory lives behind the back of such.
> And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee;
> Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand;
> If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
> To bind our loves up in an holy band:
> For others say thou dost deserve; and I
> Believe it better than reportingly."

And Benedick, on his part, is equally sincere in his repentance with equal reason, after he has heard the grey-beard, Leonato, and his friend, "Monsieur Love," discourse of the desperate state of his supposed inamorata.

"This can be no trick; the conference was sadly borne.—They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady; it seems her affections have the full bent. Love me! why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censur'd: they say, I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her; they say too, that she will rather die than give any sign of affection.—I did never think to marry: I must not seem proud:—happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending. They say, the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness: and virtuous;—'tis so, I cannot reprove it: and wise—but for loving me:—by my troth it is no addition to her wit;—

nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her.—I may chance to have some old quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have rail'd so long against marriage : but doth not the appetite alter ? A man loves the meat in his youth, that he cannot endure in his age.—Shall quips, and sentences, and these paper bullets of the brain, awe a man from the career of his humour ? No : the world must be peopled. When I said, I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were marry'd.—Here comes Beatrice : by this day, she's a fair lady : I do spy some marks of love in her."

The beauty of all this arises from the characters of the persons so entrapped. Benedick is a professed and staunch enemy to marriage, and gives very plausible reasons for the faith that is in him. And as to Beatrice, she persecutes him all day with her jests (so that he could hardly think of being troubled with them at night) she not only turns him but all other things into jest, and is proof against every thing serious.

> "*Hero.* Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
> Misprising what they look on ; and her wit
> Values itself so highly, that to her
> All matter else seems weak : she cannot love,
> Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
> She is so self-endeared.
> *Ursula.* Sure, I think so ;
> And therefore, certainly, it were not good
> She knew his love, lest she make sport at it.
> *Hero.* Why, you speak truth : I never yet saw man,
> How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featur'd,
> But she would spell him backward : if fair-fac'd,
> She'd swear the gentleman should be her sister ;
> If black, why, nature, drawing of an antick,
> Made a foul blot : if tall, a lance ill-headed ;
> If low, an agate very vilely cut :
> If speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds ;
> If silent, why, a block moved with none.
> So turns she every man the wrong side out ;
> And never gives to truth and virtue that
> Which simpleness and merit purchaseth."

These were happy materials for Shakespear to work on, and he has made a happy use of them. Perhaps that middle point of comedy was never more nicely hit in which the ludicrous blends with the tender, and our follies, turning round against themselves in support of our affections, retain nothing but their humanity.

Dogberry and Verges in this play are inimitable specimens of quaint blundering and misprisions of meaning; and are a standing record of that formal gravity of pretension and total want of common understanding, which Shakespear no doubt copied from real life, and which in the course of two hundred years appear to have ascended from the lowest to the highest offices in the state.

AS YOU LIKE IT

Shakespear has here converted the forest of Arden into another Arcadia, where they "fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world." It is the most ideal of any of this author's plays. It is a pastoral drama, in which the interest arises more out of the sentiments and characters than out of the actions or situations. It is not what is done, but what is said, that claims our attention. Nursed in solitude, "under the shade of melancholy boughs," the imagination grows soft and delicate, and the wit runs riot in idleness, like a spoiled child, that is never sent to school. Caprice and fancy reign and revel here, and stern necessity is banished to the court. The mild sentiments of humanity are strengthened with thought and leisure; the echo of the cares and noise of the world strikes upon the ear of those "who have felt them knowingly," softened by time and distance. "They hear the tumult, and are still." The very air of the place seems to breath a spirit of philosophical poetry: to stir the thoughts, to touch the heart with pity, as the drowsy forest rustles to the sighing gale. Never was there such beautiful moralising, equally free from pedantry or petulance.

> "And this their life, exempt from public haunts,
> Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."

Jaques is the only purely contemplative character in Shakespear. He thinks, and does nothing. His whole

occupation is to amuse his mind, and he is totally regardless of his body and his fortunes. He is the prince of philosophical idlers; his only passion is thought; he sets no value upon any thing but as it serves as food for reflection. He can "suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs;" the motley fool, "who morals on the time," is the greatest prize he meets with in the forest. He resents Orlando's passion for Rosalind as some disparagement of his own passion for abstract truth; and leaves the Duke, as soon as he is restored to his sovereignty, to seek his brother out who has quitted it, and turned hermit.

—"Out of these convertites
There is much matter to be heard and learnt."

Within the sequestered and romantic glades of the forest of Arden, they find leisure to be good and wise, or to play the fool and fall in love. Rosalind's character is made up of sportive gaiety and natural tenderness: her tongue runs the faster to conceal the pressure at her heart. She talks herself out of breath, only to get deeper in love. The coquetry with which she plays with her lover in the double character which she has to support is managed with the nicest address. How full of voluble, laughing grace is all her conversation with Orlando—

—"In heedless mazes running
With wanton haste and giddy cunning."

How full of real fondness and pretended cruelty is her answer to him when he promises to love her "For ever and a day!"

"Say a day without the ever: no, no, Orlando, men are April when they woo, December when they wed: maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives: I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen; more clamorous than a parrot against rain; more new-fangled than an ape; more giddy in my desires than a monkey; I will weep for nothing like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyen, and that when you are inclined to sleep.

Orlando. But will my Rosalind do so?

Rosalind. By my life she will do as I do."

The silent and retired character of Celia is a necessary relief to the provoking loquacity of Rosalind, nor can any

thing be better conceived or more beautifully described than the mutual affection between the two cousins :—

> —"We still have slept together,
> Rose at an instant, learn'd, play'd, eat together,
> And wheresoe'r we went, like Juno's swans,
> Still we went coupled and inseparable."

The unrequited love of Silvius for Phebe shews the perversity of this passion in the commonest scenes of life, and the rubs and stops which nature throws in its way, where fortune has placed none. Touchstone is not in love, but he will have a mistress as a subject for the exercise of his grotesque humour, and to shew his contempt for the passion, by his indifference about the person. He is a rare fellow. He is a mixture of the ancient cynic philosopher with the modern buffoon, and turns folly into wit, and wit into folly, just as the fit takes him. His courtship of Audrey not only throws a degree of ridicule on the state of wedlock itself, but he is equally an enemy to the prejudices of opinion in other respects. The lofty tone of enthusiasm, which the Duke and his companions in exile spread over the stillness and solitude of a country life, receives a pleasant shock from Touchstone's sceptical determination of the question.

"*Corin.* And how like you this shepherd's life, Mr. Touchstone?

Clown. Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach."

Zimmerman's celebrated work on Solitude discovers only *half* the sense of this passage.

There is hardly any of Shakespear's plays that contains a greater number of passages that have been quoted in books of extracts, or a greater number of phrases that have become in a manner proverbial. If we were to give all the striking passages, we should give half the play. We will only recall a few of the most delightful to the reader's recollection. Such are the meeting between

Orlando and Adam, the exquisite appeal of Orlando to the humanity of the Duke and his company to supply him with food for the old man, and their answer, the Duke's description of a country life, and the account of Jaques moralising on the wounded deer, his meeting with Touchstone in the forest, his apology for his own melancholy and his satirical vein, and the well-known speech on the stages of human life, the old song of "Blow, blow, thou winter's wind," Rosalind's description of the marks of a lover and the progress of time with different persons, the picture of the snake wreathed round Oliver's neck while the lioness watches her sleeping prey, and Touchstone's lecture to the shepherd, his defence of cuckolds, and panegyric on the virtues of "an If."—All of these are familiar to the reader: there is one passage of equal delicacy and beauty which may have escaped him, and with it we shall close our account of As You Like It. It is Phebe's description of Ganimed at the end of the third act.

"Think not I love him, tho' I ask for him;
'Tis but a peevish boy, yet he talks well;—
But what care I for words! yet words do well,
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear:
It is a pretty youth; not very pretty;
But sure he's proud, and yet his pride becomes him;
He'll make a proper man; the best thing in him
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up:
He is not very tall, yet for his years he's tall;
His leg is but so so, and yet 'tis well;
There was a pretty redness in his lip,
A little riper, and more lusty red
Than that mix'd in his cheek; 'twas just the difference
Betwixt the constant red and mingled damask.
There be some women, Silvius, had they mark'd him
In parcels as I did, would have gone near
To fall in love with him: but for my part
I love him not, nor hate him not; and yet
I have more cause to hate him than to love him;
For what had he to do to chide at me?"

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

The Taming of the Shrew is almost the only one of Shakespear's comedies that has a regular plot, and downright moral. It is full of bustle, animation, and rapidity of action. It shews admirably how self-will is only to be got the better of by stronger will, and how one degree of ridiculous perversity is only to be driven out by another still greater. Petruchio is a madman in his senses; a very honest fellow, who hardly speaks a word of truth, and succeeds in all his tricks and impostures. He acts his assumed character to the life, with the most fantastical extravagance, with complete presence of mind, with untired animal spirits, and without a particle of ill humour from beginning to end.—The situation of poor Katherine, worn out by his incessant persecutions, becomes at last almost as pitiable as it is ludicrous, and it is difficult to say which to admire most, the unaccountableness of his actions, or the unalterableness of his resolutions. It is a character which most husbands ought to study, unless perhaps the very audacity of Petruchio's attempt might alarm them more than his success would encourage them. What a sound must the following speech carry to some married ears!

> "Think you a little din can daunt my ears?
> Have I not in my time heard lions roar?
> Have I not heard the sea, puff'd up with winds,
> Rage like an angry boar, chafed with sweat?
> Have I not heard great ordnance in the field?
> And heav'n's artillery thunder in the skies?
> Have I not in a pitched battle heard
> Loud larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets clang?
> And do you tell me of a woman's tongue,
> That gives not half so great a blow to hear,
> As will a chesnut in a farmer's fire?"

Not all Petruchio's rhetoric would persuade more than "some dozen followers" to be of this heretical way of

thinking. He unfolds his scheme for the *Taming of the Shrew*, on a principle of contradiction, thus :—

> " I'll woo her with some spirit when she comes.
> Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain
> She sings as sweetly as a nightingale ;
> Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear
> As morning roses newly wash'd with dew ;
> Say she be mute, and will not speak a word,
> Then I'll commend her volubility,
> And say she uttereth piercing eloquence :
> If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks,
> As though she bid me stay by her a week ;
> If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day,
> When I shall ask the banns, and when be married ?"

He accordingly gains her consent to the match, by telling her father that he has got it; disappoints her by not returning at the time he has promised to wed her, and when he returns, creates no small consternation by the oddity of his dress and equipage. This, however, is nothing to the astonishment excited by his mad-brained behaviour at the marriage. Here is the account of it by an eye-witness :—

> " *Gremio.* Tut, she's a lamb, a dove, a fool to him :
> I'll tell you, Sir Lucentio ; when the priest
> Should ask if Katherine should be his wife ?
> Ay, by gogs woons, quoth he ; and swore so loud,
> That, all amaz'd the priest let fall the book ;
> And as he stooped again to take it up,
> This mad-brain'd bridegroom took him such a cuff,
> That down fell priest and book, and book and priest.
> Now take them up, quoth he, if any list.
> *Tranio.* What said the wench when he rose up again ?
> *Gremio.* Trembled and shook ; for why, he stamp'd and swore,
> As if the vicar meant to cozen him.
> But after many ceremonies done,
> He calls for wine ; a health, quoth he ; as if
> He'ad been abroad carousing with his mates
> After a storm ; quaft off the muscadel,
> And threw the sops all in the sexton's face ;
> Having no other cause but that his beard
> Grew thin and hungerly, and seem'd to ask
> His sops as he was drinking. This done, he took
> The bride about the neck, and kiss'd her lips
> With such a clamourous smack, that at their parting
> All the church echoed : and I seeing this,

Came thence for very shame; and after me,
I know, the rout is coming;—
Such a mad marriage never was before."

The most striking and at the same time laughable feature in the character of Petruchio throughout, is the studied approximation to the intractable character of real madness, his apparent insensibility to all external considerations, and utter indifference to every thing but the wild and extravagant freaks of his own self-will. There is no contending with a person on whom nothing makes any impression but his own purposes, and who is bent on his own whims just in proportion as they seem to want common sense. With him a thing's being plain and reasonable is a reason against it. The airs he gives himself are infinite, and his caprices as sudden as they are groundless. The whole of his treatment of his wife at home is in the same spirit of ironical attention and inverted gallantry. Every thing flies before his will, like a conjuror's wand, and he only metamorphoses his wife's temper by metamorphosing her senses and all the objects she sees, at a word's speaking. Such are his insisting that it is the moon and not the sun which they see, &c. This extravagance reaches its most pleasant and poetical height in the scene where, on their return to her father's, they meet old Vincentio, whom Petruchio immediately addresses as a young lady:—

"*Petruchio.* Good morrow, gentle mistress, where away?
Tell me, sweet Kate, and tell me truly too,
Hast thou beheld a fresher gentlewoman?
Such war of white and red within her cheeks;
What stars do spangle heaven with such beauty,
As those two eyes become that heav'nly face?
Fair lovely maid, once more good day to thee:
Sweet Kate, embrace her for her beauty's sake.
Hortensio. He'll make the man mad to make a woman of him.
Katherine. Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet,
Whither away, or where is thy abode?
Happy the parents of so fair a child;
Happier the man whom favourable stars
Allot thee for his lovely bed-fellow.

Petruchio. Why, how now, Kate, I hope thou art not mad :
This is a man, old, wrinkled, faded, wither'd,
And not a maiden, as thou say'st he is.
Katherine. Pardon, old father, my mistaken eyes
That have been so bedazed with the sun
That every thing I look on seemeth green.
Now I perceive thou art a reverend father."

The whole is carried off with equal spirit, as if the poet's comic Muse had wings of fire. It is strange how one man could be so many things ; but so it is. The concluding scene, in which trial is made of the obedience of the new-married wives (so triumphantly for Petruchio) is a very happy one.—In some parts of this play there is a little too much about music-masters and masters of philosophy. They were things of greater rarity in those days than they are now. Nothing however can be better than the advice which Tranio gives his master for the prosecution of his studies :—

"The mathematics, and the metaphysics,
Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you :
No profit grows, where is no pleasure ta'en :
In brief, sir, study what you most affect."

We have heard the *Honey-Moon* called "an elegant Katherine and Petruchio." We suspect we do not understand this word *elegant* in the sense that many people do. But in our sense of the word, we should call Lucentio's description of his mistress elegant.

"Tranio, I saw her coral lips to move,
And with her breath she did perfume the air :
Sacred and sweet was all I saw in her."

When Biondello tells the same Lucentio for his encouragement, "I knew a wench married in an afternoon as she went to the garden for parsley to stuff a rabbit, and so may you, sir "—there is nothing elegant in this, and yet we hardly know which of the two passages is the best.

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW is a play within a play. It is supposed to be a play acted for the benefit of Sly the tinker, who is made to believe himself a lord, when he wakes after a drunken brawl. The character of Sly and the remarks with which he accompanies the play are as

good as the play itself. His answer when he is asked how he likes it, "Indifferent well; 'tis a good piece of work, would 'twere done," is in good keeping, as if he were thinking of his Saturday night's job. Sly does not change his tastes with his new situation, but in the midst of splendour and luxury still calls out lustily and repeatedly "for a pot o' the smallest ale." He is very slow in giving up his personal identity in his sudden advancement.—"I am Christophero Sly, call not me honour nor lordship. I ne'er drank sack in my life: and if you give me any conserves, give me conserves of beef: ne'er ask me what raiment I'll wear, for I have no more doublets than backs, no more stockings than legs, nor no more shoes than feet, nay, sometimes more feet than shoes, or such shoes as my toes look through the over-leather.—What, would you make me mad? Am not I Christophero Sly, old Sly's son of Burtonheath, by birth a pedlar, by education a card-maker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker? Ask Marion Hacket, the fat alewife of Wincot, if she know me not; if she say I am not fourteen-pence on the score for sheer ale, score me up for the lying'st knave in Christendom."

This is honest. "The Slies are no rogues," as he says of himself. We have a great predilection for this representative of the family; and what makes us like him the better is, that we take him to be of kin (not many degrees removed) to Sancho Panza.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

This is a play as full of genius as it is of wisdom. Yet there is an original sin in the nature of the subject, which prevents us from taking a cordial interest in it. "The height of moral argument" which the author has maintained in the intervals of passion or blended with

the more powerful impulses of nature, is hardly surpassed in any of his plays. But there is in general a want of passion; the affections are at a stand; our sympathies are repulsed and defeated in all directions. The only passion which influences the story is that of Angelo; and yet he seems to have a much greater passion for hypocrisy than for his mistress. Neither are we greatly enamoured of Isabella's rigid chastity, though she could not act otherwise than she did. We do not feel the same confidence in the virtue that is "sublimely good" at another's expense, as if it had been put to some less disinterested trial. As to the Duke, who makes a very imposing and mysterious stage-character, he is more absorbed in his own plots and gravity than anxious for the welfare of the state; more tenacious of his own character than attentive to the feelings and apprehensions of others. Claudio is the only person who feels naturally; and yet he is placed in circumstances of distress which almost preclude the wish for his deliverance. Mariana is also in love with Angelo, whom we hate. In this respect, there may be said to be a general system of cross-purposes between the feelings of the different characters and the sympathy of the reader or the audience. This principle of repugnance seems to have reached its height in the character of Master Barnardine, who not only sets at defiance the opinions of others, but has even thrown off all self-regard,—"one that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep; careless, reckless, and fearless of what's past, present, and to come." He is a fine antithesis to the morality and the hypocrisy of the other characters of the play. Barnardine is Caliban transported from Prospero's wizard island to the forests of Bohemia or the prisons of Vienna. He is the creature of bad habits as Caliban is of gross instincts. He has however a strong notion of the natural fitness of things, according to his own sensations—"He has been drinking hard all night, and he will not be hanged that day"—and Shakespear has let him off at last. We do not under-

stand why the philosophical German critic, Schlegel, should be so severe on those pleasant persons, Lucio, Pompey, and Master Froth, as to call them "wretches." They appear all mighty comfortable in their occupations, and determined to pursue them, "as the flesh and fortune should serve." A very good exposure of the want of self-knowledge and contempt for others, which is so common in the world, is put into the mouth of Abhorson, the jailor, when the Provost proposes to associate Pompey with him in his office—"A bawd, sir? Fie upon him, he will discredit our mystery." And the same answer will serve in nine instances out of ten to the same kind of remark, "Go to, sir, you weigh equally; a feather will turn the scale." Shakespear was in one sense the least moral of all writers; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies; and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature, in all its shapes, degrees, depressions, and elevations. The object of the pedantic moralist is to find out the bad in every thing: his was to shew that "there is some soul of goodness in things evil." Even Master Barnardine is not left to the mercy of what others think of him; but when he comes in, speaks for himself, and pleads his own cause, as well as if counsel had been assigned him. In one sense, Shakespear was no moralist at all: in another, he was the greatest of all moralists. He was a moralist in the same sense in which nature is one. He taught what he had learnt from her. He shewed the greatest knowledge of humanity with the greatest fellow-feeling for it.

One of the most dramatic passages in the present play is the interview between Claudio and his sister, when she comes to inform him of the conditions on which Angelo will spare his life.

> "*Claudio.* Let me know the point.
> *Isabella.* O, I do fear thee, Claudio: and I quake,
> Lest thou a feverous life should'st entertain,
> And six or seven winters more respect
> Than a perpetual honour. Dar'st thou die?
> The sense of death is most in apprehension;
> And the poor beetle, that we tread upon,

In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies.
Claudio. Why give you me this shame ?
Think you I can a resolution fetch
From flowery tenderness ; if I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in mine arms.
Isabella. There spake my brother ! there my father's grave
Did utter forth a voice ! Yes, thou must die :
Thou art too noble to conserve a life
In base appliances. This outward-sainted deputy—
Whose settled visage and deliberate word
Nips youth i' the head, and follies doth emmew,
As faulcon doth the fowl—is yet a devil.
Claudio. The princely Angelo ?
Isabella. Oh, 'tis the cunning livery of hell,
The damned'st body to invest and cover
In princely guards ! Dost thou think, Claudio,
If I would yield him my virginity,
Thou might'st be freed ?
Claudio. Oh, heavens ! it cannot be.
Isabella. Yes, he would give it thee, for this rank offence,
So to offend him still : this night's the time
That I should do what I abhor to name,
Or else thou dy'st to-morrow.
Claudio. Thou shalt not do't.
Isabella. Oh, were it but my life,
I'd throw it down for your deliverance
As frankly as a pin.
Claudio. Thanks, dear Isabel.
Isabella. Be ready, Claudio, for your death to-morrow.
Claudio. Yes.—Has he affections in him,
That thus can make him bite the law by the nose ?
When he would force it, sure it is no sin ;
Or of the deadly seven it is the least.
Isabella. Which is the least ?
Claudio. If it were damnable, he, being so wise,
Why should he for the momentary trick
Be perdurably fin'd ? Oh, Isabel !
Isabella. What says my brother ?
Claudio. Death is a fearful thing.
Isabella. And shamed life a hateful.
Claudio. Aye, but to die, and go we know not where ;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot ;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod ; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice ;

To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world ; or to be worse than worst
Of those, that lawless and incertain thoughts
Imagine howling !—'tis too horrible !
The weariest and most loathed worldly life,
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death.
Isabella. Alas ! alas !
Claudio. Sweet sister, let me live :
What sin you do to save a brother's life,
Nature dispenses with the deed so far,
That it becomes a virtue."

What adds to the dramatic beauty of this scene and the effect of Claudio's passionate attachment to life is, that it immediately follows the Duke's lecture to him, in the character of the Friar, recommending an absolute indifference to it.

—" Reason thus with life,—
If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing,
That none but fools would keep : a breath thou art,
Servile to all the skyey influences
That do this habitation, where thou keep'st,
Hourly afflict : merely, thou art death's fool ;
For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,
And yet run'st toward him still : thou art not noble ;
For all the accommodations, that thou bear'st,
Are nurs'd by baseness : thou art by no means valiant ;
For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork
Of a poor worm : thy best of rest is sleep,
And that thou oft provok'st ; yet grossly fear'st
Thy death, which is no more. Thou art not thyself ;
For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains
That issue out of dust : happy thou art not ;
For what thou hast not, still thou striv'st to get ;
And what thou hast, forget'st : thou art not certain ;
For thy complexion shifts to strange effects,
After the moon : if thou art rich, thou art poor ;
For, like as ass, whose back with ingots bows,
Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
And death unloads thee : friend thou hast none ;
For thy own bowels, which do call thee sire,
The mere effusion of thy proper loins,
Do curse the gout, serpigo, and the rheum,
For ending thee no sooner ; thou hast nor youth, nor age ;

But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both : for all thy blessed youth
Becomes as aged, and doth beg the alms
Of palsied eld ; and when thou art old, and rich,
Thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty,
To make thy riches pleasant. What's yet in this,
That bears the name of life ? Yet in this life
Lie hid more thousand deaths ; yet death we fear,
That makes these odds all even."

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR is no doubt a very amusing play, with a great deal of humour, character, and nature in it : but we should have liked it much better, if any one else had been the hero of it, instead of Falstaff. We could have been contented if Shakespear had not been "commanded to shew the knight in love." Wits and philosophers, for the most part, do not shine in that character ; and Sir John himself, by no means, comes off with flying colours. Many people complain of the degradation and insults to which Don Quixote is so frequently exposed in his various adventures. But what are the unconscious indignities which he suffers, compared with the sensible mortifications which Falstaff is made to bring upon himself ? What are the blows and buffettings which the Don receives from the staves of the Yanguesian carriers or from Sancho Panza's more hard-hearted hands, compared with the contamination of the buck-basket, the disguise of the fat woman of Brentford, and the horns of Herne the hunter, which are discovered on Sir John's head ? In reading the play, we indeed wish him well through all these discomfitures, but it would have been as well if he had not got into them. Falstaff in the MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR is not the man he was in the two parts of *Henry IV.* His wit and eloquence have left him. Instead of making a butt of others, he is made a butt of by them. Neither is there a single particle of love in him

to excuse his follies: he is merely a designing bare-faced knave, and an unsuccessful one. The scene with Ford as Master Brook, and that with Simple, Slender's man, who comes to ask after the Wise Woman, are almost the only ones in which his old intellectual ascendancy appears. He is like a person recalled to the stage to perform an unaccustomed and ungracious part; and in which we perceive only "some faint sparks of those flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the hearers in a roar." But the single scene with Doll Tearsheet, or Mrs. Quickly's account of his desiring "to eat some of housewife Keach's prawns," and telling her "to be no more so familiarity with such people," is worth the whole of the MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR put together. Ford's jealousy, which is the main spring of the comic incidents, is certainly very well managed. Page, on the contrary, appears to be somewhat uxorious in his disposition; and we have pretty plain indications of the effect of the characters of the husbands on the different degrees of fidelity in their wives. Mrs. Quickly makes a very lively go-between, both between Falstaff and his Dulcineas, and Anne Page and her lovers, and seems in the latter case so intent on her own interest as totally to overlook the intentions of her employers. Her master, Doctor Caius, the Frenchman, and her fellow-servant Jack Rugby, are very completely described. This last-mentioned person is rather quaintly commended by Mrs. Quickly as "an honest, willing, kind fellow, as ever servant shall come in house withal, and I warrant you, no tell-tale, nor no breed-bate; his worst fault is, that he is given to prayer; he is something peevish that way; but no body but has his fault." The Welch Parson, Sir Hugh Evans (a title which in those days was given to the clergy) is an excellent character in all respects. He is as respectable as he is laughable. He has "very good discretions, and very odd humours." The duel-scene with Caius gives him an opportunity to shew his, "cholers and his tremblings of mind," his valour and his melancholy, in an irresistible manner. In the dialogue, which

at his mother's request he holds with his pupil, William Page, to shew his progress in learning, it is hard to say whether the simplicity of the master or the scholar is the greatest. Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol, are but the shadows of what they were; and Justice Shallow himself has little of his consequence left. But his cousin, Slender, makes up for the deficiency. He is a very potent piece of imbecility. In him the pretensions of the worthy Gloucestershire family are well kept up, and immortalised. He and his friend Sackerson and his book of songs and his love of Anne Page and his having nothing to say to her can never be forgotten. It is the only first-rate character in the play: but it is in that class. Shakespear is the only writer who was as great in describing weakness as strength.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

This comedy is taken very much from the Menæchmi of Plautus, and is not an improvement on it. Shakespear appears to have bestowed no great pains on it, and there are but a few passages which bear the decided stamp of his genius. He seems to have relied on his author, and on the interest arising out of the intricacy of the plot. The curiosity excited is certainly very considerable, though not of the most pleasing kind. We are teazed as with a riddle, which notwithstanding we try to solve. In reading the play, from the sameness of the names of the two Antipholises and the two Dromios, as well from their being constantly taken for each other by those who see them, it is difficult, without a painful effort of attention, to keep the characters distinct in the mind. And again, on the stage, either the complete similarity of their persons and dress must produce the same perplexity whenever they first enter, or the identity of appearance which the story supposes, will be destroyed. We still, however,

having a clue to the difficulty, can tell which is which, merely from the practical contradictions which arise, as soon as the different parties begin to speak ; and we are indemnified for the perplexity and blunders into which we are thrown by seeing others thrown into greater and almost inextricable ones.—This play (among other considerations) leads us not to feel much regret that Shakespear was not what is called a classical scholar. We do not think his *forte* would ever have lain in imitating or improving on what others invented, so much as in inventing for himself, and perfecting what he invented,—not perhaps by the omission of faults, but by the addition of the highest excellencies. His own genius was strong enough to bear him up, and he soared longest and best on unborrowed plumes.—The only passage of a very Shakespearian cast in this comedy is the one in which the Abbess, with admirable characteristic artifice, makes Adriana confess her own misconduct in driving her husband mad.

"*Abbess.* How long hath this possession held the man ?
Adriana. This week he hath been heavy, sour, sad,
And much, much different from the man he was ;
But, till this afternoon, his passion
Ne'er brake into extremity of rage.
Abbess. Hath he not lost much wealth by wreck at sea ?
Bury'd some dear friend ? Hath not else his eye
Stray'd his affection in unlawful love ?
A sin prevailing much in youthful men,
Who give their eyes the liberty of gazing.
Which of these sorrows is he subject to ?
Adriana. To none of these, except it be the last :
Namely, some love, that drew him oft from home.
Abbess. You should for that have reprehended him.
Adriana. Why, so I did.
Abbess. But not rough enough.
Adriana. As roughly as my modesty would let me.
Abbess. Haply, in private.
Adriana. And in assemblies too.
Abbess. Aye, but not enough.
Adriana. It was the copy of our conference :
In bed, he slept not for my urging it ;
At board, he fed not for my urging it ;
Alone it was the subject of my theme ?
In company, I often glanc'd at it ;
Still did I tell him it was vile and bad.

Abbess. And therefore came it that the man was mad :
The venom'd clamours of a jealous woman
Poison more deadly than a mad dog's tooth.
It seems, his sleeps were hinder'd by thy railing :
And therefore comes it that his head is light.
Thou say'st his meat was sauc'd with thy upbraidings :
Unquiet meals make ill digestions,
Therefore the raging fire of fever bred :
And what's a fever but a fit of madness ?
Thou say'st his sports were hinder'd by thy brawls :
Sweet recreation barr'd, what doth ensue,
But moody and dull melancholy,
Kinsman to grim and comfortless despair ;
And, at her heels, a huge infectious troop
Of pale distemperatures, and foes to life ?
In food, in sport, and life-preserving rest
To be disturb'd, would mad or man or beast :
The consequence is then, thy jealous fits
Have scar'd thy husband from the use of wits.
Luciana. She never reprehended him but mildly,
When he demeaned himself rough, rude, and wildly.—
Why bear you these rebukes, and answer not ?
Adriana. She did betray me to my own reproof."

Pinch the conjuror is also an excrescence not to be found in Plautus. He is indeed a very formidable anachronism.

"They brought one Pinch, a hungry lean-fac'd villain,
A meer anatomy, a mountebank,
A thread-bare juggler and a fortune-teller ;
A needy, hollow-ey'd, sharp-looking wretch,
A living dead man."

This is exactly like some of the Puritanical portraits to be met with in Hogarth.

DOUBTFUL PLAYS OF SHAKESPEAR

We shall give for the satisfaction of the reader what the celebrated German critic, Schlegel, says on this subject, and then add a very few remarks of our own.

"All the editors, with the exception of Capell, are

unanimous in rejecting *Titus Andronicus* as unworthy of Shakespear, though they always allow it to be printed with the other pieces, as the scape-goat, as it were, of their abusive criticism. The correct method in such an investigation is first to examine into the external grounds, evidences, &c. and to weigh their worth; and then to adduce the internal reasons derived from the quality of the work. The critics of Shakespear follow a course directly the reverse of this; they set out with a preconceived opinion against a piece, and seek, in justification of this opinion, to render the historical grounds suspicious, and to set them aside. *Titus Andronicus* is to be found in the first folio edition of Shakespear's works, which it was known was conducted by Heminge and Condell, for many years his friends and fellow-managers of the same theatre. Is it possible to persuade ourselves that they would not have known if a piece in their repertory did or did not actually belong to Shakespear? And are we to lay to the charge of these honourable men a designed fraud in this single case, when we know that they did not shew themselves so very desirous of scraping every thing together which went by the name of Shakespear, but, as it appears, merely gave those plays of which they had manuscripts in hand? Yet the following circumstance is still stronger: George Meres, a contemporary and admirer of Shakespear, mentions *Titus Andronicus* in an enumeration of his works, in the year 1598. Meres was personally acquainted with the poet, and so very intimately, that the latter read over to him his Sonnets before they were printed. I cannot conceive that all the critical scepticism in the world would be sufficient to get over such a testimony.

"This tragedy, it is true, is framed according to a false idea of the tragic, which by an accumulation of cruelties and enormities degenerates into the horrible, and yet leaves no deep impression behind: the story of Tereus and Philomela is heightened and overcharged under other names, and mixed up with the repast of Atreus and Thyestes, and many other incidents. In detail there is no want of beautiful lines, bold images, nay, even features

which betray the peculiar conception of Shakespear. Among these we may reckon the joy of the treacherous Moor at the blackness and ugliness of his child begot in adultery ; and in the compassion of Titus Andronicus, grown childish through grief, for a fly which had been struck dead, and his rage afterwards when he imagines he discovers in it his black enemy, we recognize the future poet of *Lear*. Are the critics afraid that Shakespear's fame would be injured, were it established that in his early youth he ushered into the world a feeble and immature work ? Was Rome the less the conqueror of the world because Remus could leap over its first walls ? Let any one place himself in Shakespear's situation at the commencement of his career. He found only a few indifferent models, and yet these met with the most favourable reception, because men are never difficult to please in the novelty of an art before their taste has become fastidious from choice and abundance. Must not this situation have had its influence on him before he learned to make higher demands on himself, and by digging deeper in his own mind, discovered the richest veins of a noble metal ? It is even highly probable that he must have made several failures before getting into the right path. Genius is in a certain sense infallible, and has nothing to learn ; but art is to be learned, and must be acquired by practice and experience. In Shakespear's acknowledged works we find hardly any traces of his apprenticeship, and yet an apprenticeship he certainly had. This every artist must have, and especially in a period where he has not before him the example of a school already formed. I consider it as extremely probable, that Shakespear began to write for the theatre at a much earlier period than the one which is generally stated, namely, not till after the year 1590. It appears that, as early as the year 1584, when only twenty years of age, he had left his paternal home and repaired to London. Can we imagine that such an active head would remain idle for six whole years without making any attempt to emerge by his talents from an uncongenial situation? That in the dedication of the poem of Venus and Adonis

he calls it, "the first heir of his invention," proves nothing against the supposition. It was the first which he printed: he might have composed it at an earlier period; perhaps, also, he did not include theatrical labours, as they then possessed but little literary dignity. The earlier Shakespear began to compose for the theatre, the less are we enabled to consider the immaturity and imperfection of a work as a proof of its spuriousness in opposition to historical evidence, if we only find in it prominent features of his mind. Several of the works rejected as spurious, may still have been produced in the period betwixt *Titus Andronicus*, and the earliest of the acknowledged pieces.

"At last, Steevens published seven pieces ascribed to Shakespear in two supplementary volumes. It is to be remarked, that they all appeared in print in Shakespear's life-time, with his name prefixed at full length. They are the following:—

"1. *Locrine.* The proofs of the genuineness of this piece are not altogether unambiguous; the grounds for doubt, on the other hand, are entitled to attention. However, this question is immediately connected with that respecting *Titus Andronicus*, and must be at the same time resolved in the affirmative or negative.

"2. *Pericles, Prince of Tyre.* This piece was acknowledged by Dryden, but as a youthful work of Shakespear. It is most undoubtedly his, and it has been admitted into several of the late editions. The supposed imperfections originate in the circumstance, that Shakespear here handled a childish and extravagant romance of the old poet Gower, and was unwilling to drag the subject out of its proper sphere. Hence he even introduces Gower himself, and makes him deliver a prologue entirely in his antiquated language and versification. This power of assuming so foreign a manner is at least no proof of helplessness.

"3. *The London Prodigal.* If we are not mistaken, Lessing pronounced this piece to be Shakespear's, and wished to bring it on the German stage.

"4. *The Puritan; or, the Widow of Watling Street.* One of my literary friends, intimately acquainted with

Shakespear, was of opinion that the poet must have wished to write a play for once in the style of Ben Jonson, and that in this way we must account for the difference between the present piece and his usual manner. To follow out this idea however would lead to a very nice critical investigation.

"5. *Thomas, Lord Cromwell.*

"6. *Sir John Oldcastle—First Part.*

"7. *A Yorkshire Tragedy.*

"The three last pieces are not only unquestionably Shakespear's, but in my opinion they deserve to be classed among his best and maturest works.—Steevens admits at last, in some degree, that they are Shakespear's, as well as the others, excepting *Locrine*, but he speaks of all of them with great contempt, as quite worthless productions. This condemnatory sentence is not however in the slightest degree convincing, nor is it supported by critical acumen. I should like to see how such a critic would, of his own natural suggestion, have decided on Shakespear's acknowledged master-pieces, and what he would have thought of praising in them, had the public opinion not imposed on him the duty of admiration. *Thomas, Lord Cromwell*, and *Sir John Oldcastle*, are biographical dramas, and models in this species: the first is linked, from its subject, to *Henry the Eighth*, and the second to *Henry the Fifth*. The second part of *Oldcastle* is wanting; I know not whether a copy of the old edition has been discovered in England, or whether it is lost. *The Yorkshire Tragedy* is a tragedy in one act, a dramatised tale of murder: the tragical effect is overpowering, and it is extremely important to see how poetically Shakespear could handle such a subject.

"There have been still farther ascribed to him:—1st. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, a comedy in one act, printed in Dodsley's Old Plays. This has certainly some appearances in its favour. It contains a merry landlord, who bears a great similarity to the one in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. However, at all events, though an ingenious, it is but a hasty sketch. 2d. *The Accusation of Paris.*

3d. *The Birth of Merlin.* 4th. *Edward the Third.* 5th. *The Fair Emma.* 6th. *Mucedorus.* 7th. *Arden of Feversham.* I have never seen any of these, and cannot therefore say any thing respecting them. From the passages cited, I am led to conjecture that the subject of *Mucedorus* is the popular story of Valentine and Orson ; a beautiful subject which Lope de Vega has also taken for a play. *Arden of Feversham* is said to be a tragedy on the story of a man, from whom the poet was descended by the mother's side. If the quality of the piece is not too directly at variance with this claim, the circumstance would afford an additional probability in its favour. For such motives were not foreign to Shakespear : he treated Henry the Seventh, who bestowed lands on his forefathers for services performed by them, with a visible partiality.

"Whoever takes from Shakespear a play early ascribed to him, and confessedly belonging to his time, is unquestionably bound to answer, with some degree of probability, this question : who has then written it ? Shakespear's competitors in the dramatic walk are pretty well known, and if those of them who have even acquired a considerable name, a Lilly, a Marlow, a Heywood, are still so very far below him, we can hardly imagine that the author of a work, which rises so high beyond theirs, would have remained unknown."—*Lectures on Dramatic Literature*, vol. ii. page 252.

We agree to the truth of this last observation, but not to the justice of its application to some of the plays here mentioned. It is true that Shakespear's best works are very superior to those of Marlow, or Heywood, but it is not true that the best of the doubtful plays above enumerated are superior or even equal to the best of theirs. *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, which Schlegel speaks of as an undoubted production of our author's, is much more in the manner of Heywood than of Shakespear. The effect is indeed overpowering, but the mode of producing it is by no means poetical. The praise which Schlegel gives to *Thomas, Lord Cromwell*, and to *Sir John Oldcastle*, is altogether exaggerated. They are very indifferent

compositions, which have not the slightest pretensions to rank with *Henry V.* or *Henry VIII.* We suspect that the German critic was not very well acquainted with the dramatic contemporaries of Shakespear, or aware of their general merits; and that he accordingly mistakes a resemblance in style and manner for an equal degree of excellence. Shakespear differed from the other writers of his age not in the mode of treating his subjects, but in the grace and power which he displayed in them. The reason assigned by a literary friend of Schlegel's for supposing *The Puritan; or, The Widow of Watling Street*, to be Shakespear's, viz. that it is in the style of Ben Jonson, that is to say, in a style just the reverse of his own, is not very satisfactory to a plain English understanding. *Locrine*, and *The London Prodigal*, if they were Shakespear's at all, must have been among the sins of his youth. *Arden of Feversham* contains several striking passages, but the passion which they express is rather that of a sanguine temperament than of a lofty imagination; and in this respect they approximate more nearly to the style of other writers of the time than to Shakespear's. *Titus Andronicus* is certainly as unlike Shakespear's usual style as it is possible. It is an accumulation of vulgar physical horrors, in which the power exercised by the poet bears no proportion to the repugnance excited by the subject. The character of Aaron the Moor is the only thing which shews any originality of conception; and the scene in which he expresses his joy "at the blackness and ugliness of his child begot in adultery," the only one worthy of Shakespear. Even this is worthy of him only in the display of power, for it gives no pleasure. Shakespear managed these things differently. Nor do we think it a sufficient answer to say that this was an embryo or crude production of the author. In its kind it is full grown, and its features decided and overcharged. It is not like a first imperfect essay, but shews a confirmed habit, a systematic preference of violent effect to every thing else. There are occasional detached images of great beauty and delicacy, but these were not beyond the powers

of other writers then living. The circumstance which inclines us to reject the external evidence in favour of this play being Shakespear's is, that the grammatical construction is constantly false and mixed up with vulgar abbreviations, a fault that never occurs in any of his genuine plays. A similar defect, and the halting measure of the verse are the chief objections to *Pericles of Tyre*, if we except the far-fetched and complicated absurdity of the story. The movement of the thoughts and passions has something in it not unlike Shakespear, and several of the descriptions are either the original hints of passages which Shakespear has ingrafted on his other plays, or are imitations of them by some contemporary poet. The most memorable idea in it is Marina's speech, where she compares the world to "a lasting storm, hurrying her from her friends."

POEMS AND SONNETS

Our idolatry of Shakespear (not to say our admiration) ceases with his plays. In his other productions, he was a mere author, though not a common author. It was only by representing others, that he became himself. He could go out of himself, and express the soul of Cleopatra; but in his own person, he appeared to be always waiting for the prompter's cue. In expressing the thoughts of others, he seemed inspired; in expressing his own, he was a mechanic. The licence of an assumed character was necessary to restore his genius to the privileges of nature, and to give him courage to break through the tyranny of fashion, the trammels of custom. In his plays, he was "as broad and casing as the general air:" in his poems, on the contrary, he appears to be "cooped and cabined in" by all the technicalities of art, by all the petty intricacies of thought and language, which poetry had learned from the controversial jargon of the schools, where words had been made a substitute for things. There was, if we

mistake not, something of modesty, and a painful sense of personal propriety at the bottom of this. Shakespear's imagination, by identifying itself with the strongest characters in the most trying circumstances, grappled at once with nature, and trampled the littleness of art under his feet: the rapid changes of situation, the wide range of the universe, gave him life and spirit, and afforded full scope to his genius; but returned into his closet again, and having assumed the badge of his profession, he could only labour in his vocation, and conform himself to existing models. The thoughts, the passions, the words which the poet's pen, "glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," lent to others, shook off the fetters of pedantry and affectation; while his own thoughts and feelings, standing by themselves, were seized upon as lawful prey, and tortured to death according to the established rules and practice of the day. In a word, we do not like Shakespear's poems, because we like his plays: the one, in all their excellencies, are just the reverse of the other. It has been the fashion of late to cry up our author's poems, as equal to his plays: this is the desperate cant of modern criticism. We would ask, was there the slightest comparison between Shakespear, and either Chaucer or Spenser, as mere poets? Not any.—The two poems of Venus and Adonis and of Tarquin and Lucrece appear to us like a couple of ice-houses. They are about as hard, as glittering, and as cold. The author seems all the time to be thinking of his verses, and not of his subject,—not of what his characters would feel, but of what he shall say; and as it must happen in all such cases, he always puts into their mouths those things which they would be the last to think of, and which it shews the greatest ingenuity in him to find out. The whole is laboured, up-hill work. The poet is perpetually singling out the difficulties of the art to make an exhibition of his strength and skill in wrestling with them. He is making perpetual trials of them as if his mastery over them were doubted. The images, which are often striking, are generally applied to

things which they are the least like : so that they do not blend with the poem, but seem stuck upon it, like splendid patch-work, or remain quite distinct from it, like detached substances, painted and varnished over. A beautiful thought is sure to be lost in an endless commentary upon it. The speakers are like persons who have both leisure and inclination to make riddles on their own situation, and to twist and turn every object or incident into acrostics and anagrams. Every thing is spun out into allegory ; and a digression is always preferred to the main story. Sentiment is built up upon plays of words ; the hero or heroine feels, not from the impulse of passion, but from the force of dialectics. There is besides a strange attempt to substitute the language of painting for that of poetry, to make us *see* their feelings in the faces of the persons ; and again, consistently with this, in the description of the picture in Tarquin and Lucrece, those circumstances are chiefly insisted on, which it would be impossible to convey except by words. The invocation to opportunity in the Tarquin and Lucrece is full of thoughts and images, but at the same time it is over-loaded by them. The concluding stanza expresses all our objections to this kind of poetry :—

> "Oh ! idle words, servants to shallow fools ;
> Unprofitable sounds, weak arbitrators ;
> Busy yourselves in skill-contending schools ;
> Debate when leisure serves with dull debaters ;
> To trembling clients be their mediators :
> For me I force not argument a straw,
> Since that my case is past all help of law."

The description of the horse in Venus and Adonis has been particularly admired, and not without reason :—

> "Round hoof'd, short jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
> Broad breast, full eyes, small head, and nostril wide,
> High crest, short ears, strait legs, and passing strong,
> Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide,
> Look what a horse should have, he did not lack,
> Save a proud rider on so proud a back."

Now this inventory of perfections shews great knowledge of the horse ; and is good matter-of-fact poetry. Let

the reader but compare it with a speech in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* where Theseus describes his hounds—

"And their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew"—

and he will perceive at once what we mean by the difference between Shakespear's own poetry, and that of his plays. We prefer the Passionate Pilgrim very much to the Lover's Complaint. It has been doubted whether the latter poem is Shakespear's.

Of the Sonnets we do not well know what to say. The subject of them seems to be somewhat equivocal; but many of them are highly beautiful in themselves, and interesting as they relate to the state of the personal feelings of the author. The following are some of the most striking :—

CONSTANCY.

"Let those who are in favour with their stars,
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.
Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread,
But as the marigold in the sun's eye ;
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior famous'd for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd :
Then happy I, that love and am belov'd,
Where I may not remove, nor be remov'd."

LOVE'S CONSOLATION.

"When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my out-cast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least :
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee,—and then my state

(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate ;
For thy sweet love remember'd, such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

NOVELTY.

"My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming ;
I love not less, though less the show appear :
That love is merchandis'd, whose rich esteeming
The owner's tongue doth publish every where.
Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
When I was wont to greet it with my lays :
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops his pipe in growth of riper days :
Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burdens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
Therefore, like her, I sometime hold my tongue,
Because I would not dull you with my song."

LIFE'S DECAY.

"That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day,
As after sun-set fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long."

In all these, as well as in many others, there is a mild tone of sentiment, deep, mellow, and sustained, very different from the crudeness of his earlier poems.

LECTURES ON THE ENGLISH POETS

LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY

ON POETRY IN GENERAL

The best general notion which I can give of poetry is, that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sounds, expressing it.

In treating of poetry, I shall speak first of the subject-matter of it, next of the forms of expression to which it gives birth, and afterwards of its connection with harmony of sound.

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men ; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape, can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry, cannot have much respect for himself, or for anything else. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment, (as some persons have been led to imagine) the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours—it has been the study and delight of mankind in all ages. Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books,

contained in lines of ten syllables, with like endings: but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, in the growth of a flower that "spreads its sweet leaves to the air, and dedicates its beauty to the sun,"—*there* is poetry, in its birth. If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider. History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and unwieldy masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century: but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man, which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship: it is "the stuff of which our life is made." The rest is "mere oblivion," a dead letter: for all that is worth remembering in life, is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry. Poetry is that fine particle within us, that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being: without it "man's life is poor as beast's." Man is a poetical animal: and those of us who do not study the principles of poetry, act upon them all our lives, like Moliere's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who had always spoken prose without knowing it. The child is a poet in fact, when he first plays at hide-and-seek, or repeats the story of Jack the Giant-killer; the shepherd-boy is a poet, when he first crowns his mistress with a garland of flowers; the countryman, when he stops to look at the rainbow; the city-apprentice, when he gazes after the Lord-Mayor's show; the miser, when he hugs his gold; the courtier, who builds his hopes upon a smile; the savage, who paints his idol with blood; the slave, who worships a tyrant, or the tyrant, who fancies himself a god;—the vain, the ambitious, the proud, the choleric man, the hero and the coward, the beggar and the king, the rich and the

poor, the young and the old, all live in a world of their own making; and the poet does no more than describe what all the others think and act. If his art is folly and madness, it is folly and madness at second hand. "There is warrant for it." Poets alone have not "such seething brains, such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cooler reason" can.

> "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact.
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
> The madman. While the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
> The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
> Such tricks hath strong imagination."

If poetry is a dream, the business of life is much the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are, because we wish them so, there is no other nor better reality. Ariosto has described the loves of Angelica and Medoro: but was not Medoro, who carved the name of his mistress on the barks of trees, as much enamoured of her charms as he? Homer has celebrated the anger of Achilles: but was not the hero as mad as the poet? Plato banished the poets from his Commonwealth, lest their descriptions of the natural man should spoil his mathematical man, who was to be without passions and affections, who was neither to laugh nor weep, to feel sorrow nor anger, to be cast down nor elated by any thing. This was a chimera, however, which never existed but in the brain of the inventor; and Homer's poetical world has outlived Plato's philosophical Republic.

Poetry then is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies, without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found for those creations of the mind "which

ecstasy is very cunning in." Neither a mere description of natural objects, nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ultimate end and aim of poetry, without the heightenings of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that while it shews us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it: the flame of the passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us, as with a flash of lightning, the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms; feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into the universe. It describes the flowing, not the fixed. It does not define the limits of sense, or analyze the distinctions of the understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or ordinary impression of any object or feeling. The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself; that is impatient of all limit; that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, for this reason, "has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things, as reason and history do." It is strictly the language of the imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power. This language is not the less true to nature, because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression

which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind. Let an object, for instance, be presented to the senses in a state of agitation or fear—and the imagination will distort or magnify the object, and convert it into the likeness of whatever is most proper to encourage the fear. "Our eyes are made the fools" of our other faculties. This is the universal law of the imagination,

> "That if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy:
> Or in the night imagining some fear,
> How easy is each bush suppos'd a bear!"

When Iachimo says of Imogen,

> "—— The flame o' th' taper
> Bows towards her, and would under-peep her lids
> To see the enclosed lights"—

this passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame to accord with the speaker's own feelings, is true poetry. The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining gold, because the least tinge of yellow in the hair has, from novelty and a sense of personal beauty, a more lustrous effect to the imagination than the purest gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower: not that he is any thing like so large, but because the excess of his size beyond what we are accustomed to expect, or the usual size of things of the same class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal to the imagination, which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight, or love. When Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause, "for they are old like him," there is nothing extravagant or impious in this sublime identification of his age with theirs; for there is no other image which could do justice to the agonising sense of his wrongs and his despair!

Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling. As in describing natural objects, it impregnates

sensible impressions with the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain, by blending them with the strongest movements of passion, and the most striking forms of nature. Tragic poetry, which is the most impassioned species of it, strives to carry on the feeling to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos, by all the force of comparison or contrast; loses the sense of present suffering in the imaginary exaggeration of it; exhausts the terror or pity by an unlimited indulgence of it; grapples with impossibilities in its desperate impatience of restraint; throws us back upon the past, forward into the future; brings every moment of our being or object of nature in startling review before us; and in the rapid whirl of events, lifts us from the depths of woe to the highest contemplations on human life. When Lear says of Edgar, "Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this;" what a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any other cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorbs all other sorrow in its own! His sorrow, like a flood, supplies the sources of all other sorrow. Again, when he exclaims in the mad scene, "The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me!" it is passion lending occasion to imagination to make every creature in league against him, conjuring up ingratitude and insult in their least looked-for and most galling shapes, searching every thread and fibre of his heart, and finding out the last remaining image of respect or attachment in the bottom of his breast, only to torture and kill it! In like manner, the "So I am" of Cordelia gushes from her heart like a torrent of tears, relieving it of a weight of love and of supposed ingratitude, which had pressed upon it for years. What a fine return of the passion upon itself is that in Othello—with what a mingled agony of regret and despair he clings to the last traces of departed happiness—when he exclaims,

——— "Oh now, for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind. Farewell content;

Farewell the plumed troops and the big war,
That make ambition virtue! Oh farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war:
And O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th' immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!"

How his passion lashes itself up and swells and rages like a tide in its sounding course, when in answer to the doubts expressed of his returning love, he says,

"Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont:
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up."—

The climax of his expostulation afterwards with Desdemona is at that line,

"But there where I had garner'd up my heart,
To be discarded thence!"—

One mode in which the dramatic exhibition of passion excites our sympathy without raising our disgust is, that in proportion as it sharpens the edge of calamity and disappointment, it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing, by making us sensible of the magnitude of the loss. The storm of passion lays bare and shews us the rich depths of the human soul: the whole of our existence, the sum total of our passions and pursuits, of that which we desire and that which we dread, is brought before us by contrast; the action and re-action are equal; the keenness of immediate suffering only gives us a more intense aspiration after, and a more intimate participation with the antagonist world of good; makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life; tugs at the heart-strings; loosens the pressure about them; and calls the springs of thought and feeling into play with tenfold force.

Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect. The domestic or prose tragedy, which is thought to be the most natural, is in this sense the least so, because it appeals almost exclusively to one of these faculties, our sensibility. The tragedies of Moore and Lillo, for this reason, however affecting at the time, oppress and lie like a dead weight upon the mind, a load of misery which it is unable to throw off: the tragedy of Shakspeare, which is true poetry, stirs our inmost affections; abstracts evil from itself by combining it with all the forms of imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart, and rouses the whole man within us.

The pleasure, however, derived from tragic poetry, is not any thing peculiar to it as poetry, as a fictitious and fanciful thing. It is not an anomaly of the imagination. It has its source and ground-work in the common love of strong excitement. As Mr. Burke observes, people flock to see a tragedy; but if there were a public execution in the next street, the theatre would very soon be empty. It is not then the difference between fiction and reality that solves the difficulty. Children are satisfied with the stories of ghosts and witches in plain prose: nor do the hawkers of full, true, and particular accounts of murders and executions about the streets, find it necessary to have them turned into penny ballads, before they can dispose of these interesting and authentic documents. The grave politician drives a thriving trade of abuse and calumnies poured out against those whom he makes his enemies for no other end than that he may live by them. The popular preacher makes less frequent mention of heaven than of hell. Oaths and nicknames are only a more vulgar sort of poetry or rhetoric. We are as fond of indulging our violent passions as of reading a description of those of others. We are as prone to make a torment of our fears, as to luxuriate in our hopes of good. If it

be asked, Why we do so ? the best answer will be, Because we cannot help it. The sense of power is as strong a principle in the mind as the love of pleasure. Objects of terror and pity exercise the same despotic control over it as those of love or beauty. It is as natural to hate as to love, to despise as to admire, to express our hatred or contempt, as our love or admiration.

> " Masterless passion sways us to the mood
> Of what it likes or loathes."

Not that we like what we loathe ; but we like to indulge our hatred and scorn of it ; to dwell upon it, to exasperate our idea of it by every refinement of ingenuity and extravagance of illustration ; to make it a bugbear to ourselves, to point it out to others in all the splendour of deformity, to embody it to the senses, to stigmatise it by name, to grapple with it in thought, in action, to sharpen our intellect, to arm our will against it, to know the worst we have to contend with, and to contend with it to the utmost. Poetry is only the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of any thing, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we cannot get rid in any other way, that gives an instant " satisfaction to the thought." This is equally the origin of wit and fancy, of comedy and tragedy, of the sublime and pathetic. When Pope says of the Lord Mayor's show,—

> " Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more!"

—when Collins makes Danger, " with limbs of giant mould,"

> —— " Throw him on the steep
> Of some loose hanging rock asleep:"

when Lear calls out in extreme anguish,

> " Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
> How much more hideous shew'st in a child
> Than the sea-monster!"

—the passion of contempt in the one case, of terror in the other, and of indignation in the last, is perfectly satisfied. We see the thing ourselves, and shew it to others as we feel it to exist, and as, in spite of ourselves, we are compelled to think of it. The imagination, by thus embodying and turning them to shape, gives an obvious relief to the indistinct and importunate cravings of the will.—We do not wish the thing to be so ; but we wish it to appear such as it is. For knowledge is conscious power ; and the mind is no longer, in this case, the dupe, though it may be the victim of vice or folly.

Poetry is in all its shapes the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics, for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason : for the end and use of poetry, " both at the first and now, was and is to hold the mirror up to nature," seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth or abstract reason. The painter of history might as well be required to represent the face of a person who has just trod upon a serpent with the still-life expression of a common portrait, as the poet to describe the most striking and vivid impressions which things can be supposed to make upon the mind, in the language of common conversation. Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so ; the impressions of common sense and strong imagination, that is, of passion and indifference, cannot be the same, and they must have a separate language to do justice to either. Objects must strike differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking) from novelty, from old acquaintance, from our ignorance of them, from our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more take away the faculty of the

imagination, than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions, to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead, are not very wise. Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm; let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting; so poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions. Hence the history of religious and poetical enthusiasm is much the same; and both have received a sensible shock from the progress of experimental philosophy. It is the undefined and uncommon that gives birth and scope to the imagination; we can only fancy what we do not know. As in looking into the mazes of a tangled wood we fill them with what shapes we please, with ravenous beasts, with caverns vast, and drear enchantments, so in our ignorance of the world about us, we make gods or devils of the first object we see, and set no bounds to the wilful suggestions of our hopes and fears.

> "And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
> Hang on each leaf and cling to every bough."

There can never be another Jacob's dream. Since that time, the heavens have gone farther off, and grown astronomical. They have become averse to the imagination, nor will they return to us on the squares of

the distances, or on Doctor Chalmers's Discourses. Rembrandt's picture brings the matter nearer to us.— It is not only the progress of mechanical knowledge, but the necessary advances of civilization that are unfavourable to the spirit of poetry. We not only stand in less awe of the preternatural world, but we can calculate more surely, and look with more indifference, upon the regular routine of this. The heroes of the fabulous ages rid the world of monsters and giants. At present we are less exposed to the vicissitudes of good or evil, to the incursions of wild beasts or "bandit fierce," or to the unmitigated fury of the elements. The time has been that "our fell of hair would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir as life were in it." But the police spoils all; and we now hardly so much as dream of a midnight murder. Macbeth is only tolerated in this country for the sake of the music; and in the United States of America, where the philosophical principles of government are carried still farther in theory and practice, we find that the Beggar's Opera is hooted from the stage. Society, by degrees, is constructed into a machine that carries us safely and insipidly from one end of life to the other, in a very comfortable prose style.

> "Obscurity her curtain round them drew,
> And siren Sloth a dull quietus sung."

The remarks which have been here made, would, in some measure, lead to a solution of the question of the comparative merits of painting and poetry. I do not mean to give any preference, but it should seem that the argument which has been sometimes set up, that painting must affect the imagination more strongly, because it represents the image more distinctly, is not well founded. We may assume without much temerity, that poetry is more poetical than painting. When artists or connoisseurs talk on stilts about the poetry of painting, they shew that they know little about poetry, and have little love for the art. Painting gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains

in itself: poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination. Again, as it relates to passion, painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events: but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, that the pinch of the interest lies.

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
> The mortal instruments are then in council;
> And the state of man, like to a little kingdom,
> Suffers then the nature of an insurrection."

But by the time that the picture is painted, all is over. Faces are the best part of a picture; but even faces are not what we chiefly remember in what interests us most. —But it may be asked then, Is there any thing better than Claude Lorraine's landscapes, than Titian's portraits, than Raphael's cartoons, or the Greek statues? Of the two first I shall say nothing, as they are evidently picturesque, rather than imaginative. Raphael's cartoons are certainly the finest comments that ever were made on the Scriptures. Would their effect be the same if we were not acquainted with the text? But the New Testament existed before the cartoons. There is one subject of which there is no cartoon, Christ washing the feet of the disciples the night before his death. But that chapter does not need a commentary! It is for want of some such resting place for the imagination that the Greek statues are little else than specious forms. They are marble to the touch and to the heart. They have not an informing principle within them. In their faultless excellence they appear sufficient to themselves. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of passion or suffering. By their beauty they are deified. But they are not objects of religious faith to us, and their forms are a reproach to common humanity. They seem to have no sympathy with us, and not to want our admiration.

Poetry in its matter and form is natural imagery or feeling, combined with passion and fancy. In its mode of conveyance, it combines the ordinary use of language with musical expression. There is a question of long standing, in what the essence of poetry consists ; or what it is that determines why one set of ideas should be expressed in prose, another in verse. Milton has told us his idea of poetry in a single line—

> "Thoughts that voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers."

As there are certain sounds that excite certain movements, and the song and dance go together, so there are, no doubt, certain thoughts that lead to certain tones of voice, or modulations of sound, and change "the words of Mercury into the songs of Apollo." There is a striking instance of this adaptation of the movement of sound and rhythm to the subject, in Spenser's description of the Satyrs accompanying Una to the cave of Sylvanus.

> "So from the ground she fearless doth arise
> And walketh forth without suspect of crime.
> They, all as glad as birds of joyous prime,
> Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
> Shouting and singing all a shepherd's rhyme;
> And with green branches strewing all the ground,
> Do worship her as queen with olive garland crown'd.
>
> And all the way their merry pipes they sound,
> That all the woods and doubled echoes ring;
> And with their horned feet do wear the ground,
> Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring;
> So towards old Sylvanus they her bring,
> Who with the noise awaked, cometh out."
>
> *Faery Queen*, b. i. c. vi.

On the contrary, there is nothing either musical or natural in the ordinary construction of language. It is a thing altogether arbitrary and conventional. Neither in the sounds themselves, which are the voluntary signs of certain ideas, nor in their grammatical arrangements in common speech, is there any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to the individual ideas, or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed to others. The

jerks, the breaks, the inequalities, and harshnesses of prose, are fatal to the flow of a poetical imagination, as a jolting road or a stumbling horse disturbs the reverie of an absent man. But poetry makes these odds all even. It is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind, untying as it were "the secret soul of harmony." Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm ;—wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous ; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins. Where one idea gives a tone and colour to others, where one feeling melts others into it, there can be no reason why the same principle should not be extended to the sounds by which the voice utters these emotions or the soul, and blends syllables and lines into each other. It is to supply the inherent defect of harmony in the customary mechanism of language, to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself—to mingle the tide of verse, "the golden cadences of poetry," with the tide of feeling, flowing and murmuring as it flows—in short, to take the language of the imagination from off the ground, and enable it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses—

> "Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deep of air—"

without being stopped, or fretted, or diverted with the abruptnesses and petty obstacles, and discordant flats and sharps of prose, that poetry was invented. It is to common language, what springs are to a carriage, or wings

to feet. In ordinary speech we arrive at a certain harmony by the modulations of the voice: in poetry the same thing is done systematically by a regular collocation of syllables. It has been well observed, that every one who declaims warmly, or grows intent upon a subject, rises into a sort of blank verse or measured prose. The merchant, as described in Chaucer, went on his way "sounding always the increase of his winning." Every prose-writer has more or less of rhythmical adaptation, except poets, who, when deprived of the regular mechanism of verse, seem to have no principle of modulation left in their writings.

An excuse might be made for rhyme in the same manner. It is but fair that the ear should linger on the sounds that delight it, or avail itself of the same brilliant coincidence and unexpected recurrence of syllables, that have been displayed in the invention and collocation of images. It is allowed that rhyme assists the memory; and a man of wit and shrewdness has been heard to say, that the only four good lines of poetry are the well-known ones which tell the number of days in the months of the year.

"Thirty days hath September," &c.

But if the jingle of names assists the memory, may it not also quicken the fancy? and there are other things worth having at our fingers' ends, besides the contents of the almanac.—Pope's versification is tiresome, from its excessive sweetness and uniformity. Shakspeare's blank verse is the perfection of dramatic dialogue.

All is not poetry that passes for such: nor does verse make the whole difference between poetry and prose. The Iliad does not cease to be poetry in a literal translation; and Addison's Campaign has been very properly denominated a Gazette in rhyme. Common prose differs from poetry, as treating for the most part either of such trite, familiar, and irksome matters of fact, as convey no extraordinary impulse to the imagination, or else of such difficult and laborious processes of the understanding, as do not admit of the wayward or violent movements either of the imagination or the passions.

I will mention three works which come as near to poetry as possible without absolutely being so, namely, the Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe, and the Tales of Boccaccio. Chaucer and Dryden have translated some of the last into English rhyme, but the essence and the power of poetry was there before. That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being "married to immortal verse." If it is of the essence of poetry to strike and fix the imagination, whether we will or no, to make the eye of childhood glisten with the starting tear, to be never thought of afterwards with indifference, John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe may be permitted to pass for poets in their way. The mixture of fancy and reality in the Pilgrim's Progress was never equalled in any allegory. His pilgrims walk above the earth, and yet are on it. What zeal, what beauty, what truth of fiction! What deep feeling in the description of Christian's swimming across the water at last, and in the picture of the Shining Ones within the gates, with wings at their backs and garlands on their heads, who are to wipe all tears from his eyes! The writer's genius, though not "dipped in dews of Castalie," was baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The prints in this book are no small part of it. If the confinement of Philoctetes in the island of Lemnos was a subject for the most beautiful of all the Greek tragedies, what shall we say to Robinson Crusoe in his? Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is for ever cut off, swell and press against his bosom, as the heaving ocean rolls its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him. Thus he says,

"As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods,

the mountains, the deserts I was in ; and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composures of my mind, this would break out upon me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together, and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst into tears or vent myself in words, it would go off, and the grief having exhausted itself would abate." P. 50.

The story of his adventures would not make a poem like the Odyssey, it is true ; but the relator had the true genius of a poet. It has been made a question whether Richardson's romances are poetry ; and the answer perhaps is, that they are not poetry, because they are not romance. The interest is worked up to an inconceivable height, but it is by an infinite number of little things, by incessant labour and calls upon the attention, by a repetition of blows that have no rebound in them. The sympathy excited is not a voluntary contribution, but a tax. Nothing is unforced and spontaneous. There is a want of elasticity and motion. The story does not "give an echo to the seat where love is throned." The heart does not answer of itself like a chord in music. The fancy does not run on before the writer with breathless expectation, but is dragged along with an infinite number of pins and wheels, like those with which the Lilliputians dragged Gulliver pinioned to the royal palace.—Sir Charles Grandison is a coxcomb. What sort of a figure would he cut, translated into an epic poem, by the side of Achilles ? Clarissa, the divine Clarissa, is too interesting by half. She is interesting in her ruffles, in her gloves, her samplers, her aunts and uncles—she is interesting in all that is uninteresting. Such things, however intensely they may be brought home to us, are not conductors to the imagination. There is infinite truth and feeling in Richardson ; but it is extracted from a *caput mortuum* of circumstances : it does not evaporate of itself. His poetical genius is like Ariel confined in a pine-tree, and requires an artificial process to let it out. Shakspeare says—

"Our poesy is as a gum
Which issues whence 'tis nourished, our gentle flame
Provokes itself, and like the current flies
Each bound it chafes.[1]

I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at different periods of history—Homer, the Bible, Dante, and let me add, Ossian. In Homer, the principle of action or life is predominant; in the Bible, the principle of faith and the idea of Providence; Dante is a personification of blind will; and in Ossian we see the decay of life, and the lag end of the world. Homer's poetry is the heroic: it is full of life and action: it is bright as the day, strong as a river. In the vigour of his intellect, he grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of social life. He saw many countries, and the manners of many men; and he has brought them all together in his poem. He describes his heroes going to battle with a prodigality of life, arising from an exuberance of animal spirits: we see them before us, their number, and their order of battle, poured out upon the plain "all plumed like ostriches, like eagles newly bathed, wanton as goats, wild as young bulls, youthful as May, and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer," covered with glittering armour, with dust and blood; while the Gods quaff their nectar in golden cups, or mingle in the fray; and the old men assembled on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The multitude of things in Homer is wonderful; their splendour, their truth, their

[1] Burke's writings are not poetry, notwithstanding the vividness of the fancy, because the subject matter is abstruse and dry, not natural, but artificial. The difference between poetry and eloquence is, that the one is the eloquence of the imagination, and the other of the understanding. Eloquence tries to persuade the will, and convince the reason: poetry produces its effect by instantaneous sympathy. Nothing is a subject for poetry that admits of a dispute. Poets are in general bad prose-writers, because their images, though fine in themselves, are not to the purpose, and do not carry on the argument. The French poetry wants the forms of the imagination. It is didactic more than dramatic. And some of our own poetry which has been most admired, is only poetry in the rhyme, and in the studied use of poetic diction.

force, and variety. His poetry is, like his religion, the poetry of number and form : he describes the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The poetry of the Bible is that of imagination and of faith : it is abstract and disembodied : it is not the poetry of form, but of power ; not of multitude, but of immensity. It does not divide into many, but aggrandizes into one. Its ideas of nature are like its ideas of God. It is not the poetry of social life, but of solitude : each man seems alone in the world, with the original forms of nature, the rocks, the earth, and the sky. It is not the poetry of action or heroic enterprise, but of faith in a supreme Providence, and resignation to the power that governs the universe. As the idea of God was removed farther from humanity, and a scattered polytheism, it became more profound and intense, as it became more universal, for the Infinite is present to every thing : " If we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there also ; if we turn to the east or the west, we cannot escape from it." Man is thus aggrandized in the image of his Maker. The history of the patriarchs is of this kind ; they are founders of a chosen race of people, the inheritors of the earth ; they exist in the generations which are to come after them. Their poetry, like their religious creed, is vast, unformed, obscure, and infinite ; a vision is upon it—an invisible hand is suspended over it. The spirit of the Christian religion consists in the glory hereafter to be revealed ; but in the Hebrew dispensation, Providence took an immediate share in the affairs of this life. Jacob's dream arose out of this intimate communion, between heaven and earth : it was this that let down, in the sight of the youthful patriarch, a golden ladder from the sky to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it, and shed a light upon the lonely place, which can never pass away. The story of Ruth, again, is as if all the depth of natural affection in the human race was involved in her breast. There are descriptions in the book of Job more prodigal of imagery, more intense in passion, than any thing in Homer, as that of the state of his prosperity, and

of the vision that came upon him by night. The metaphors in the Old Testament are more boldly figurative. Things were collected more into masses, and gave a greater *momentum* to the imagination.

Dante was the father of modern poetry, and he may therefore claim a place in this connection. His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism ; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thraldom in which the human mind had been so long held, is felt in every page. He stood bewildered, not appalled, on that dark shore which separates the ancient and the modern world ; and saw the glories of antiquity dawning through the abyss of time, while revelation opened its passage to the other world. He was lost in wonder at what had been done before him, and he dared to emulate it. Dante seems to have been indebted to the Bible for the gloomy tone of his mind, as well as for the prophetic fury which exalts and kindles his poetry ; but he is utterly unlike Homer. His genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self-will personified. In all that relates to the descriptive or fanciful part of poetry, he bears no comparison to many who had gone before, or who have come after him ; but there is a gloomy abstraction in his conceptions, which lies like a dead weight upon the mind ; a benumbing stupor, a breathless awe, from the intensity of the impression ; a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams ; an identity of interest, which moulds every object to its own purposes, and clothes all things with the passions and imaginations of the human soul,—that make amends for all other deficiencies. The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves, they want grandeur, beauty, and order ; but they become every thing by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them. He takes advantage even of the nakedness and dreary vacuity of his subject. His imagination peoples the shades of death, and broods over the silent air. He is

the severest of all writers, the most hard and impenetrable, the most opposite to the flowery and glittering ; who relies most on his own power, and the sense of it in others, and who leaves most room to the imagination of his readers. Dante's only endeavour is to interest ; and he interests by exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been created ; but he seizes on the attention, by shewing us the effect they produce on his feelings ; and his poetry accordingly gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation, which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror. The improbability of the events, the abruptness and monotony in the Inferno, are excessive : but the interest never flags, from the continued earnestness of the author's mind. Dante's great power is in combining internal feelings with external objects. Thus the gate of hell, on which that withering inscription is written, seems to be endowed with speech and consciousness, and to utter its dread warning, not without a sense of mortal woes. This author habitually unites the absolutely local and individual with the greatest wildness and mysticism. In the midst of the obscure and shadowy regions of the lower world, a tomb suddenly rises up with the inscription, "I am the tomb of Pope Anastasius the Sixth :" and half the personages whom he has crowded into the Inferno are his own acquaintance. All this, perhaps, tends to heighten the effect by the bold intermixture of realities, and by an appeal, as it were, to the individual knowledge and experience of the reader. He affords few subjects for picture. There is, indeed, one gigantic one, that of Count Ugolino, of which Michael Angelo made a bas-relief, and which Sir Joshua Reynolds ought not to have painted.

Another writer whom I shall mention last, and whom I cannot persuade myself to think a mere modern in the groundwork, is Ossian. He is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihed, Ossian is the

decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets, namely, the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country—he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed ; with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his head ; the fox peeps out of the ruined tower ; the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale ; and the strings of his harp seem, as the hand of age, as the tale of other times, passes over them, to sigh and rustle like the dry reeds in the winter's wind ! The feeling of cheerless desolation, of the loss of the pith and sap of existence, of the annihilation of the substance, and the clinging to the shadow of all things as in a mock-embrace, is here perfect. In this way, the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Salgar is the finest of all. If it were indeed possible to shew that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain, " Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian ! "

LECTURE II

ON CHAUCER AND SPENSER

Having, in the former Lecture, given some account of the nature of poetry in general, I shall proceed, in the next place, to a more particular consideration of the genius and history of English poetry. I shall take, as the subject of the present lecture, Chaucer and Spenser, two out of four of the greatest names in poetry, which this country has to boast. Both of them, however, were much indebted to the early poets of Italy, and may be

considered as belonging, in a certain degree, to the same school. The freedom and copiousness with which our most original writers, in former periods, availed themselves of the productions of their predecessors, frequently transcribing whole passages, without scruple or acknowledgment, may appear contrary to the etiquette of modern literature, when the whole stock of poetical commonplaces has become public property, and no one is compelled to trade upon any particular author. But it is not so much a subject of wonder, at a time when to read and write was of itself an honorary distinction, when learning was almost as great a rarity as genius, and when in fact those who first transplanted the beauties of other languages into their own, might be considered as public benefactors, and the founders of a national literature.—There are poets older than Chaucer, and in the interval between him and Spenser; but their genius was not such as to place them in any point of comparison with either of these celebrated men; and an inquiry into their particular merits or defects might seem rather to belong to the province of the antiquary, than be thought generally interesting to the lovers of poetry in the present day.

Chaucer (who has been very properly considered as the father of English poetry) preceded Spenser by two centuries. He is supposed to have been born in London, in the year 1328, during the reign of Edward III. and to have died in 1400, at the age of seventy-two. He received a learned education at one, or at both of the universities, and travelled early into Italy, where he became thoroughly imbued with the spirit and excellences of the great Italian poets and prose-writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccace; and is said to have had a personal interview with one of these, Petrarch. He was connected, by marriage, with the famous John of Gaunt, through whose interest he was introduced into several public employments. Chaucer was an active partisan, a religious reformer, and from the share he took in some disturbances, on one occasion, he was obliged to fly the country. On his return, he was imprisoned, and made his peace with

government, as it is said, by a discovery of his associates. Fortitude does not appear, at any time, to have been the distinguishing virtue of poets.—There is, however, an obvious similarity between the practical turn of Chaucer's mind and restless impatience of his character, and the tone of his writings. Yet it would be too much to attribute the one to the other as cause and effect: for Spenser, whose poetical temperament was as effeminate as Chaucer's was stern and masculine, was equally engaged in public affairs, and had mixed equally in the great world. So much does native disposition predominate over accidental circumstances, moulding them to its previous bent and purposes! For while Chaucer's intercourse with the busy world, and collision with the actual passions and conflicting interests of others, seemed to brace the sinews of his understanding, and gave to his writings the air of a man who describes persons and things that he had known and been intimately concerned in; the same opportunities, operating on a differently constituted frame, only served to alienate Spenser's mind the more from the "close-pent up" scenes of ordinary life, and to make him "rive their concealing continents," to give himself up to the unrestrained indulgence of "flowery tenderness."

It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite in this respect. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; Chaucer, in severe activity of mind. As Spenser was the most romantic and visionary, Chaucer was the most practical of all the great poets, the most a man of business and the world. His poetry reads like history. Every thing has a downright reality; at least in the relator's mind. A simile, or a sentiment, is as if it were given in upon evidence. Thus he describes Cressid's first avowal of her love.

> "And as the new abashed nightingale,
> That stinteth first when she beginneth sing,
> When that she heareth any herde's tale,
> Or in the hedges any wight stirring,
> And after, sicker, doth her voice outring;
> Right so Cresseide, when that her dread stent,
> Open'd her heart, and told him her intent."

This is so true and natural, and beautifully simple, that the two things seem identified with each other. Again, it is said in the Knight's Tale—

> "Thus passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
> Till it felle ones in a morwe of May,
> That Emelie that fayrer was to sene
> Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene ;
> And fresher than the May with floures newe,
> For with the rose-colour strof hire hewe :
> I n'ot which was the finer of hem two."

This scrupulousness about the literal preference, as if some question of matter of fact was at issue, is remarkable. I might mention that other, where he compares the meeting between Palamon and Arcite to a hunter waiting for a lion in a gap ;—

> "That stondeth at a gap with a spere,
> Whan hunted is the lion or the bere,
> And hereth him come rushing in the greves,
> And breking bothe the boughes and the leves :"—

or that still finer one of Constance, when she is condemned to death :—

> "Have ye not seen somtime a pale face
> (Among a prees) of him that hath been lad
> Toward his deth, wheras he geteth no grace,
> And swiche a colour in his face hath had,
> Men mighten know him that was so bestad,
> Amonges all the faces in that route ;
> So stant Custance, and loketh hire aboute."

The beauty, the pathos here does not seem to be of the poet's seeking, but a part of the necessary texture of the fable. He speaks of what he wishes to describe with the accuracy, the discrimination of one who relates what has happened to himself, or has had the best information from those who have been eye-witnesses of it. The strokes of his pencil always tell. He dwells only on the essential, on that which would be interesting to the persons really concerned : yet as he never omits any material circumstance, he is prolix from the number of points on which he touches, without being diffuse on any one ; and is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject, as other writers

are from the frequency of their digressions from it. The chain of his story is composed of a number of fine links, closely connected together, and rivetted by a single blow. There is an instance of the minuteness which he introduces into his most serious descriptions in his account of Palamon when left alone in his cell :

> "Swiche sorrow he maketh that the grete tour
> Resouned of his yelling and clamour :
> The pure fetters on his shinnes grete
> Were of his bitter salte teres wete."

The mention of this last circumstance looks like a part of the instructions he had to follow, which he had no discretionary power to leave out or introduce at pleasure. He is contented to find grace and beauty in truth. He exhibits for the most part the naked object, with little drapery thrown over it. His metaphors, which are few, are not for ornament, but use, and as like as possible to the things themselves. He does not affect to shew his power over the reader's mind, but the power which his subject has over his own. The readers of Chaucer's poetry feel more nearly what the persons he describes must have felt, than perhaps those of any other poet. His sentiments are not voluntary effusions of the poet's fancy, but founded on the natural impulses and habitual prejudices of the characters he has to represent. There is an inveteracy of purpose, a sincerity of feeling, which never relaxes or grows vapid, in whatever they do or say. There is no artificial, pompous display, but a strict parsimony of the poet's materials, like the rude simplicity of the age in which he lived. His poetry resembles the root just springing from the ground, rather than the full-blown flower. His muse is no "babbling gossip of the air," fluent and redundant ; but, like a stammerer, or a dumb person, that has just found the use of speech, crowds many things together with eager haste, with anxious pauses, and fond repetitions to prevent mistake. His words point as an index to the objects, like the eye or finger. There were none of the common-places of poetic diction in our author's time, no reflected lights of fancy,

no borrowed roseate tints; he was obliged to inspect things for himself, to look narrowly, and almost to handle the object, as in the obscurity of morning we partly see and partly grope our way; so that his descriptions have a sort of tangible character belonging to them, and produce the effect of sculpture on the mind. Chaucer had an equal eye for truth of nature and discrimination of character; and his interest in what he saw gave new distinctness and force to his power of observation. The picturesque and the dramatic are in him closely blended together, and hardly distinguishable; for he principally describes external appearances as indicating character, as symbols of internal sentiment. There is a meaning in what he sees; and it is this which catches his eye by sympathy. Thus the costume and dress of the Canterbury Pilgrims—of the Knight—the Squire—the Oxford Scholar—the Gap-toothed Wife of Bath, and the rest, speak for themselves. To take one or two of these at random:

"There was also a nonne, a Prioresse,
That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy;
Hire gretest othe n'as but by seint Eloy:
And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.
Ful wel she sange the service divine
Entuned in hire nose ful swetely;
And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
For Frenche of Paris was to hire unknowe.
At mete was she wel ytaughte withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.

* * * * * * *

And sikerly she was of great disport,
And ful plesant, and amiable of port,
And peined hire to contrefeten chere
Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.
But for to speken of hire conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede.
But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,

Or if men smote it with a yerde smerte :
And all was conscience and tendre herte.
Ful semely hire wimple ypinched was ;
Hire nose tretis ; hire eyen grey as glas ;
Hire mouth ful smale ; and therto soft and red ;
But sickerly she hadde a fayre forehed.
It was almost a spanne brode, I trowe."

"A Monk there was, a fayre for the maistrie,
An out-rider, that loved venerie :
A manly man, to ben an abbot able.
Ful many a deinte hors hadde he in stable :
And whan he rode, men mighte his bridel here,
Gingeling in a whistling wind as clere,
And eke as loude, as doth the chapell belle,
Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.
The reule of Seint Maure and of Seint Beneit,
Because that it was olde and somdele streit,
This ilke monk lette olde thinges pace,
And held after the newe world the trace.
He yave not of the text a pulled hen,
That saith, that hunters ben not holy men ;—
Therfore he was a prickasoure a right :
Greihoundes he hadde as swift as foul of flight :
Of pricking and of hunting for the hare
Was all his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.
I saw his sleves purfiled at the hond
With gris, and that the finest of the lond.
And for to fasten his hood under his chinne,
He had of gold ywrought a curious pinne :
A love-knotte in the greter end ther was.
His hed was balled, and shone as any glas,
And eke his face, as it hadde ben anoint.
He was a lord ful fat and in good point.
His eyen stepe, and rolling in his hed,
That stemed as a forneis of a led.
His botes souple, his hors in gret estat,
Now certainly he was a fayre prelat.
He was not pale as a forpined gost.
A fat swan loved he best of any rost.
His palfrey was as broune as is a bery."

The Serjeant at Law is the same identical individual as Lawyer Dowling in Tom Jones, who wished to divide himself into a hundred pieces, to be in a hundred places at once.

"No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he semed besier than he was."

The Frankelein, in "whose hous it snewed of mete and drinke;" the Shipman, "who rode upon a rouncie, as he couthe;" the Doctour of Phisike, "whose studie was but litel of the Bible;" the Wif of Bath, in

> "All whose parish ther was non,
> That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
> And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
> That she was out of alle charitee;"

—the poure Persone of a toun, "whose parish was wide, and houses fer asonder;" the Miller, and the Reve, "a slendre colerike man," are all of the same stamp. They are every one samples of a kind; abstract definitions of a species. Chaucer, it has been said, numbered the classes of men, as Linnæus numbered the plants. Most of them remain to this day: others that are obsolete, and may well be dispensed with, still live in his descriptions of them. Such is the Sompnoure:

> "A Sompnoure was ther with us in that place,
> That hadde a fire-red cherubinnes face,
> For sausefleme he was, with eyen narwe,
> As hote he was, and likerous as a sparwe,
> With scalled browes blake, and pilled berd:
> Of his visage children were sore aferd.
> Ther n'as quicksilver, litarge, ne brimston,
> Boras, ceruse, ne oile of tartre non,
> Ne oinement that wolde clense or bite,
> That him might helpen of his whelkes white,
> Ne of the knobbes sitting on his chekes.
> Wel loved he garlike, onions, and lekes,
> And for to drinke strong win as rede as blood.
> Than wolde he speke, and crie as he were wood.
> And whan that he wel dronken had the win,
> Than wold he speken no word but Latin.
> A fewe termes coude he, two or three,
> That he had lerned out of som decree;
> No wonder is, he heard it all the day.—
> In danger hadde he at his owen gise
> The yonge girles of the diocise,
> And knew hir conseil, and was of hir rede.
> A gerlond hadde he sette upon his hede
> As gret as it were for an alestake:
> A bokeler hadde he made him of a cake.
> With him ther rode a gentil Pardonere—
> That hadde a vois as smale as hath a gote."

It would be a curious speculation (at least for those who think that the characters of men never change, though manners, opinions, and institutions may) to know what has become of this character of the Sompnoure in the present day ; whether or not it has any technical representative in existing professions ; into what channels and conduits it has withdrawn itself, where it lurks unseen in cunning obscurity, or else shews its face boldly, pampered into all the insolence of office, in some other shape, as it is deterred or encouraged by circumstances. *Chaucer's characters modernised*, upon this principle of historic derivation, would be a useful addition to our knowledge of human nature. But who is there to undertake it ?

The descriptions of the equipage, and accoutrements of the two kings of Thrace and Inde, in the Knight's Tale, are as striking and grand, as the others are lively and natural :

"Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace :
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face.
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout ;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe.
And as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.
Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake, for-old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed sate full of stones bright,
Of fine rubies and of diamants.
About his char ther wenten white alaunts,
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound.—
With Arcita, in stories as men find,
The grete Emetrius, the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,

Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete.
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete ;
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His crispe here like ringes were yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the Sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin,
A fewe fraknes in his face yspreint,
Betwixen yelwe and blake somdel ymeint,
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five and twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was wel begonnen for to spring ;
His vois was as a trompe thondering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond freshe and lusty for to sene.
Upon his hond he bare for his deduit
An egle tame, as any lily whit.—
About this king ther ran on every part
Ful many a tame leon and leopart."

What a deal of terrible beauty there is contained in this description ! The imagination of a poet brings such objects before us, as when we look at wild beasts in a menagerie ; their claws are pared, their eyes glitter like harmless lightning ; but we gaze at them with a pleasing awe, clothed in beauty, formidable in the sense of abstract power.

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess the same sort of characteristic excellence, or what might be termed *gusto*. They have a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground. Inanimate objects are thus made to have a fellow-feeling in the interest of the story ; and render back the sentiment of the speaker's mind. One of the finest parts of Chaucer is of this mixed kind. It is the beginning of the Flower and the Leaf, where he describes the delight of that young beauty, shrowded in her bower, and listening, in the morning of the year, to the singing of the nightingale ; while her joy rises with the rising song, and gushes out afresh at every pause, and is borne along

with the full tide of pleasure, and still increases, and repeats, and prolongs itself, and knows no ebb. The coolness of the arbour, its retirement, the early time of the day, the sudden starting up of the birds in the neighbouring bushes, the eager delight with which they devour and rend the opening buds and flowers, are expressed with a truth and feeling, which make the whole appear like the recollection of an actual scene:

"Which as me thought was right a pleasing sight,
And eke the briddes songst for to here,
Would haue rejoyced any earthly wight,
And I that couth not yet in no manere
Heare the nightingale of all the yeare,
Ful busily herkened with herte and with eare,
If I her voice perceiue coud any where.

And I that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainely
There is no herte I deme in such dispaire,
Ne with thoughtes froward and contraire,
So ouerlaid, but it should soone haue bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I sie
As full of blossomes as it might be,
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough, and as him list he eet
Here and there of buds and floures sweet.

And to the herber side was joyning
This faire tree, of which I haue you told,
And at the last the brid began to sing,
Whan he had eaten what he eate wold,
So passing sweetly, that by manifold
It was more pleasaunt than I coud deuise,
And whan his song was ended in this wise,

The nightingale with so merry a note
Answered him, that all the woode rong
So sodainly, that as it were a sote,
I stood astonied, so was I with the song
Thorow rauished, that till late and long,
I ne wist in what place I was, ne where,
And ayen me thought she song euen by mine ere.

Wherefore I waited about busily
On euery side, if I her might see,
And at the last I gan full well aspie
Where she sat in a fresh grene laurer tree,
On the further side euen right by me,
That gaue so passing a delicious smell,
According to the eglentere full well.

Whereof I had so inly great pleasure,
That as me thought I surely rauished was
Into Paradice, where my desire
Was for to be, and no ferther passe
As for that day, and on the sote grasse,
I sat me downe, for as for mine entent,
The birds song was more conuenient,

And more pleasaunt to me by manifold,
Than meat or drinke, or any other thing,
Thereto the herber was so fresh and cold,
The wholesome sauours eke so comforting,
That as I demed, sith the beginning
Of the world was neur seene or than
So pleasaunt a ground of none earthly man.

And as I sat the birds harkening thus,
Me thought that I heard voices sodainly,
The most sweetest and most delicious
That euer any wight I trow truly
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accord was in so goode musike,
That the uoice to angels was most like."

There is here no affected rapture, no flowery sentiment: the whole is an ebullition of natural delight "welling out of the heart," like water from a crystal spring. Nature is the soul of art: there is a strength as well as a simplicity in the imagination that reposes entirely on nature, that nothing else can supply. It was the same trust in nature, and reliance on his subject, which enabled Chaucer to describe the grief and patience of Griselda; the faith of Constance; and the heroic perseverance of the little child, who, going to school through the streets of Jewry,

"Oh *Alma Redemptoris mater*, loudly sung,"

and who after his death still triumphed in his song. Chaucer has more of this deep, internal, sustained sentiment, than any other writer, except Boccaccio. In depth

of simple pathos, and intensity of conception, never swerving from his subject, I think no other writer comes near him, not even the Greek tragedians. I wish to be allowed to give one or two instances of what I mean. I will take the following from the Knight's Tale. The distress of Arcite, in consequence of his banishment from his love, is thus described :

"Whan that Arcite to Thebes comen was,
Ful oft a day he swelt and said Alas,
For sene his lady shall he never mo.
And shortly to concluden all his wo,
So mochel sorwe hadde never creature,
That is or shall be, while the world may dure.
His slepe, his mete, his drinke is him byraft.
That lene he wex, and drie as is a shaft.
His eyen holwe, and grisly to behold,
His hewe salwe, and pale as ashen cold,
And solitary he was, and ever alone,
And wailing all the night, making his mone.
And if he herde song or instrument,
Than wold he wepe, he mighte not be stent.
So feble were his spirites, and so low,
And changed so, that no man coude know
His speche ne his vois, though men it herd."

This picture of the sinking of the heart, of the wasting away of the body and mind, of the gradual failure of all the faculties under the contagion of a rankling sorrow, cannot be surpassed. Of the same kind is his farewel to his mistress, after he has gained her hand and lost his life in the combat :

"Alas the wo ! alas the peines stronge,
That I for you have suffered, and so longe !
Alas the deth ! alas min Emilie !
Alas departing of our compagnie ;
Alas min hertes quene ! alas my wif !
Min hertes ladie, ender of my lif !
What is this world ? what axen men to have ?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Alone withouten any compagnie."

The death of Arcite is the more affecting, as it comes after triumph and victory, after the pomp of sacrifice, the solemnities of prayer, the celebration of the gorgeous rites

of chivalry. The descriptions of the three temples of Mars, of Venus, and Diana, of the ornaments and ceremonies used in each, with the reception given to the offerings of the lovers, have a beauty and grandeur, much of which is lost in Dryden's version. For instance, such lines as the following are not rendered with their true feeling.

> "Why shulde I not as well eke tell you all
> The purtreiture that was upon the wall
> Within the temple of mighty Mars the rede—
> That highte the gret temple of Mars in Trace
> In thilke colde and frosty region,
> Ther as Mars hath his sovereine mansion.
> First on the wall was peinted a forest,
> In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
> With knotty knarry barrein trees old
> Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to behold;
> In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
> As though a storme shuld bresten every bough."

And again, among innumerable terrific images of death and slaughter painted on the wall, is this one:

> "The statue of Mars upon a carte stood
> Armed, and looked grim as he were wood.
> A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete
> With eyen red, and of a man he ete."

The story of Griselda is in Boccaccio; but the Clerk of Oxenforde, who tells it, professes to have learned it from Petrarch. This story has gone all over Europe, and has passed into a proverb. In spite of the barbarity of the circumstances, which are abominable, the sentiment remains unimpaired and unalterable. It is of that kind "that heaves no sigh, that sheds no tear;" but it hangs upon the beatings of the heart; it is a part of the very being; it is as inseparable from it as the breath we draw. It is still and calm as the face of death. Nothing can touch it in its ethereal purity: tender as the yielding flower, it is fixed as the marble firmament. The only remonstrance she makes, the only complaint she utters against all the ill-treatment she receives, is that single line where, when turned back naked to her father's house, she says,

> "Let me not like a worm go by the way."

The first outline given of the character is inimitable :

" Nought fer fro thilke paleis honourable,
Wher as this markis shope his mariage,
Ther stood a thorpe, of sighte delitable,
In which that poure folk of that village
Hadden hir bestes and her herbergage,
And of hir labour toke hir sustenance,
After that the erthe yave hem habundance.

Among this poure folk ther dwelt a man,
Which that was holden pourest of hem all :
But highe God somtime senden can
His grace unto a litel oxes stall :
Janicola men of that thorpe him call.
A doughter had he, faire ynough to sight,
And Grisildis this yonge maiden hight.

But for to speke of vertuous beautee,
Than was she on the fairest under Sonne :
Ful pourely yfostred up was she :
No likerous lust was in hire herte yronne ;
Ful ofter of the well than of the tonne
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plese,
She knew wel labour, but non idel ese.

But though this mayden tendre were of age,
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee
Ther was enclosed sad and ripe corage :
And in gret reverence and charitee
Hire olde poure fader fostred she :
A few sheep spinning on the feld she kept,
She wolde not ben idel til she slept.

And whan she homward came she wolde bring
Wortes and other herbes times oft,
The which she shred and sethe for hire living,
And made hire bed ful hard, and nothing soft :
And ay she kept hire fadres lif on loft
With every obeisance and diligence,
That child may don to fadres reverence,

Upon Grisilde, this poure creature,
Ful often sithe this markis sette his sye,
As he on hunting rode paraventure :
And whan it fell that he might hire espie,
He not with wanton loking of folie
His eyen cast on hire, but in sad wise
Upon hire chere he wold him oft avise,

Commending in his herte hire womanhede,
And eke hire vertue, passing any wight
Of so yong age, as wel in chere as dede.
For though the people have no gret insight
In vertue, he considered ful right
Hire bountee, and disposed that he wold
Wedde hire only, if ever he wedden shold.

Grisilde of this (God wot) ful innocent,
That for hire shapen was all this array,
To fetchen water at a welle is went,
And cometh home as sone as ever she may.
For wel she had herd say, that thilke day
The markis shulde wedde, and, if she might,
She wolde fayn han seen som of that sight.

She thought, 'I wol with other maidens stond,
That ben my felawes, in our dore, and see
The markisesse, and therto wol I fond
To don at home, as sone as it may be,
The labour which that longeth unto me,
And than I may at leiser hire behold,
If she this way unto the castel hold.'

And as she wolde over the threshfold gon,
The markis came and gan hire for to call,
And she set doun her water-pot anon
Beside the threshfold in an oxes stall,
And doun upon hire knees she gan to fall.
And with sad countenance kneleth still,
Till she had herd what was the lordes will."

The story of the little child slain in Jewry, (which is told by the Prioress, and worthy to be told by her who was "all conscience and tender heart,") is not less touching than that of Griselda. It is simple and heroic to the last degree. The poetry of Chaucer has a religious sanctity about it, connected with the manners and superstitions of the age. It has all the spirit of martyrdom.

It has also all the extravagance and the utmost licentiousness of comic humour, equally arising out of the manners of the time. In this too Chaucer resembled Boccaccio that he excelled in both styles, and could pass at will "from grave to gay, from lively to severe;" but he never confounded the two styles together (except from that involuntary and unconscious mixture of the pathetic

and humorous, which is almost always to be found in nature,) and was exclusively taken up with what he set about, whether it was jest or earnest. The Wife of Bath's Prologue (which Pope has very admirably modernised) is, perhaps, unequalled as a comic story. The Cock and the Fox is also excellent for lively strokes of character and satire. January and May is not so good as some of the others. Chaucer's versification, considering the time at which he wrote, and that versification is a thing in a great degree mechanical, is not one of his least merits. It has considerable strength and harmony, and its apparent deficiency in the latter respect arises chiefly from the alterations which have since taken place in the pronunciation or mode of accenting the words of the language. The best general rule for reading him is to pronounce the final *e*, as in reading Italian.

It was observed in the last Lecture that painting describes what the object is in itself, poetry what it implies or suggests. Chaucer's poetry is not, in general, the best confirmation of the truth of this distinction, for his poetry is more picturesque and historical than almost any other. But there is one instance in point which I cannot help giving in this place. It is the story of the three thieves who go in search of Death to kill him, and who meeting with him, are entangled in their fate by his words, without knowing him. In the printed catalogue to Mr. West's (in some respects very admirable) picture of Death on the Pale Horse, it is observed, that "In poetry the same effect is produced by a few abrupt and rapid gleams of description, touching, as it were with fire, the features and edges of a general mass of awful obscurity; but in painting, such indistinctness would be a defect, and imply that the artist wanted the power to pourtray the conceptions of his fancy. Mr. West was of opinion that to delineate a physical form, which in its moral impression would approximate to that of the visionary Death of Milton, it was necessary to endow it, if possible, with the appearance of super-human strength and energy. He has therefore exerted the utmost force and perspicuity of

his pencil on the central figure."—One might suppose from this, that the way to represent a shadow was to make it as substantial as possible. Oh, no! Painting has its prerogatives, (and high ones they are) but they lie in representing the visible, not the invisible. The moral attributes of Death are powers and effects of an infinitely wide and general description, which no individual or physical form can possibly represent, but by a courtesy of speech, or by a distant analogy. The moral impression of Death is essentially visionary; its reality is in the mind's eye. Words are here the only *things;* and things, physical forms, the mere mockeries of the understanding. The less definite, the less bodily the conception, the more vast, unformed, and unsubstantial, the nearer does it approach to some resemblance of that omnipresent, lasting, universal, irresistible principle, which every where, and at some time or other, exerts its power over all things. Death is a mighty abstraction, like Night, or Space, or Time. He is an ugly customer, who will not be invited to supper, or to sit for his picture. He is with us and about us, but we do not see him. He stalks on before us, and we do not mind him: he follows us close behind, and we do not turn to look back at him. We do not see him making faces at us in our life-time, nor perceive him afterwards sitting in mock-majesty, a twin-skeleton, beside us, tickling our bare ribs, and staring into our hollow eye-balls! Chaucer knew this. He makes three riotous companions go in search of Death to kill him, they meet with an old man whom they reproach with his age, and ask why he does not die, to which he answers thus:

> "Ne Deth, alas! ne will not han my lif.
> Thus walke I like a restless caitiff,
> And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
> I knocke with my staf, erlich and late,
> And say to hire, 'Leve mother, let me in.
> Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin,
> Alas! when shall my bones ben at reste?
> Mother, with you wolde I changen my cheste,
> That in my chambre longe time hath be,
> Ye, for an heren cloute to wrap in me.'

But yet to me she will not don that grace,
For which ful pale and welked is my face."

They then ask the old man where they shall find out Death to kill him, and he sends them on an errand which ends in the death of all three. We hear no more of him, but it is Death that they have encountered!

The interval between Chaucer and Spenser is long and dreary. There is nothing to fill up the chasm but the names of Occleve, "ancient Gower," Lydgate, Wyatt, Surrey, and Sackville. Spenser flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was sent with Sir John Davies into Ireland, of which he has left behind him some tender recollections in his description of the bog of Allan, and a record in an ably written paper, containing observations on the state of that country and the means of improving it, which remain in full force to the present day. Spenser died at an obscure inn in London, it is supposed in distressed circumstances. The treatment he received from Burleigh is well known. Spenser, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active: it is inspired by the love of ease, and relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets, he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy, and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment, which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Farther, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendor of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in a company, gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In Spenser, we wander in another world, among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer

valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it; and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment—and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the Mask of Cupid he makes the God of Love "clap on high his coloured winges *twain:*" and it is said of Gluttony, in the Procession of the Passions,

> "In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad."

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty; as where he compares Prince Arthur's crest to the appearance of the almond tree:

> "Upon the top of all his lofty crest,
> A bunch of hairs discolour'd diversely
> With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest
> Did shake and seem'd to daunce for jollity;
> Like to an almond tree ymounted high
> On top of green Selenis all alone,
> With blossoms brave bedecked daintily;
> Her tender locks do tremble every one
> At every little breath that under heav'n is blown."

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence; or the still solitude of a hermit's cell—in the extremes of sensuality or refinement.

In reading the Faery Queen, you see a little withered old man by a wood-side opening a wicket, a giant, and a dwarf lagging far behind, a damsel in a boat upon an enchanted lake, wood-nymphs, and satyrs; and all of a sudden you are transported into a lofty palace, with tapers burning, amidst knights and ladies, with dance and revelry, and song, "and mask, and antique pageantry." What can be more solitary, more shut up in itself, than

his description of the house of Sleep, to which Archimago sends for a dream :

" And more to lull him in his slumber soft
A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
Mix'd with a murmuring wind, much like the sound
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swound.
No other noise, nor people's troublous cries.
That still are wont t' annoy the walled town
Might there be heard ; but careless Quiet lies
Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemies."

It is as if " the honey-heavy dew of slumber " had settled on his pen in writing these lines. How different in the subject (and yet how like in beauty) is the following description of the Bower of Bliss :

" Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound
Of all that mote delight a dainty ear ;
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere :
Right hard it was for wight which did it hear,
To tell what manner musicke that mote be ;
For all that pleasing is to living eare
Was there consorted in one harmonee :
Birds, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade
Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet :
The angelical soft trembling voices made
To th' instruments divine respondence meet.
The silver sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the waters fall ;
The water's fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call ;
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all."

The remainder of the passage has all that voluptuous pathos, and languid brilliancy of fancy, in which this writer excelled :

" The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay ;
Ah ! see, whoso fayre thing dost fain to see,
In springing flower the image of thy day !
Ah ! see the virgin rose, how sweetly she
Doth first peep forth with bashful modesty,
That fairer seems the less ye see her may !
Lo ! see soon after, how more bold and free
Her bared bosom she doth broad display ;
Lo ! see soon after, how she fades and falls away !

So passeth in the passing of a day
Of mortal life the leaf, the bud, the flower;
Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
That erst was sought to deck both bed and bower
Of many a lady and many a paramour!
Gather therefore the rose whilst yet is prime,
For soon comes age that will her pride deflower;
Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,
Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime.[1]

He ceased; and then gan all the quire of birds
Their divers notes to attune unto his lay,
As in approvance of his pleasing wordes.
The constant pair heard all that he did say,
Yet swerved not, but kept their forward way
Through many covert groves and thickets close,
In which they creeping did at last display [2]
That wanton lady with her lover loose,
Whose sleepy head she in her lap did soft dispose.

Upon a bed of roses she was laid
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
And was arrayed or rather disarrayed,
All in a veil of silk and silver thin,
That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
But rather shewed more white, if more might be:
More subtle web Arachne cannot spin;
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched dew, do not in the air more lightly flee.

Her snowy breast was bare to greedy spoil
Of hungry eyes which n' ote therewith be fill'd,
And yet through languor of her late sweet toil
Few drops more clear than nectar forth distill'd,
That like pure Orient perles adown it trill'd;
And her fair eyes sweet smiling in delight
Moisten'd their fiery beams, with which she thrill'd
Frail hearts, yet quenched not; like starry light,
Which sparkling on the silent waves does seem more bright."

The finest things in Spenser are, the character of Una, in the first book; the House of Pride; the Cave of Mammon, and the Cave of Despair; the account of Memory, of whom it is said, among other things,

"The wars he well remember'd of King Nine,
Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine;"

[1] Taken from Tasso.

[2] This word is an instance of those unwarrantable freedoms which Spenser sometimes took with language.

the description of Belphœbe ; the story of Florimel and the Witch's son ; the Gardens of Adonis, and the Bower of Bliss ; the Mask of Cupid ; and Colin Clout's vision, in the last book. But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them : they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser. For instance, when Britomart, seated amongst the young warriors, lets fall her hair and discovers her sex, is it necessary to know the part she plays in the allegory, to understand the beauty of the following stanza ?

> "And eke that stranger knight amongst the rest
> Was for like need enforc'd to disarray.
> Tho when as vailed was her lofty crest,
> Her golden locks that were in trammels gay
> Upbounden, did themselves adown display,
> And raught unto her heels like sunny beams
> That in a cloud their light did long time stay ;
> Their vapour faded, shew their golden gleams,
> And through the persant air shoot forth their azure streams."

Or is there any mystery in what is said of Belphœbe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been entangled in it as she fled through the woods ? Or is it necessary to have a more distinct idea of Proteus, than that which is given of him in his boat, with the frighted Florimel at his feet, while

> "—— the cold icicles from his rough beard
> Dropped adown upon her snowy breast ! "

Or is it not a sufficient account of one of the sea-gods that pass by them, to say—

> "That was Arion crowned :—
> So went he playing on the watery plain."

Or to take the Procession of the Passions that draw the coach of Pride, in which the figures of Idleness, of Gluttony, of Lechery, of Avarice, of Envy, and of Wrath speak, one should think, plain enough for themselves; such as this of Gluttony:

"And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,
Deformed creature, on a filthy swine;
His belly was up blown with luxury;
And eke with fatness swollen were his eyne;
And like a crane his neck was long and fine,
With which he swallowed up excessive feast,
For want whereof poor people oft did pine. . . .

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad;
For other clothes he could not wear for heat:
And on his head an ivy garland had,
From under which fast trickled down the sweat:
Still as he rode, he somewhat still did eat.
And in his hand did bear a bouzing can,
Of which he supt so oft, that on his seat
His drunken corse he scarce upholden can;
In shape and size more like a monster than a man."

Or this of Lechery:

"And next to him rode lustfull Lechery
Upon a bearded goat, whose rugged hair
And whaly eyes (the sign of jealousy)
Was like the person's self whom he did bear:
Who rough and black, and filthy did appear.
Unseemly man to please fair lady's eye:
Yet he of ladies oft was loved dear,
When fairer faces were bid standen by:
O! who does know the bent of woman's fantasy?

In a green gown he clothed was full fair,
Which underneath did hide his filthiness;
And in his hand a burning heart he bare,
Full of vain follies and new fangleness;
For he was false and fraught with fickleness;
And learned had to love with secret looks;
And well could dance; and sing with ruefulness;
And fortunes tell; and read in loving books;
And thousand other ways to bait his fleshly hooks.

Inconstant man that loved all he saw,
And lusted after all that he did love;
Ne would his looser life be tied to law;
But joyed weak women's hearts to tempt and prove,
If from their loyal loves he might them move."

This is pretty plain-spoken. Mr. Southey says of Spenser:

> "————Yet not more sweet
> Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
> High priest of all the Muses' mysteries!"

On the contrary, no one was more apt to pry into mysteries which do not strictly belong to the Muses.

Of the same kind with the Procession of the Passions, as little obscure, and still more beautiful, is the Mask of Cupid, with his train of votaries:

> "The first was Fancy, like a lovely boy
> Of rare aspect, and beauty without peer;
>
> His garment neither was of silk nor say,
> But painted plumes in goodly order dight,
> Like as the sun-burnt Indians do array
> Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight:
> As those same plumes so seem'd he vain and light,
> That by his gait might easily appear;
> For still he far'd as dancing in delight,
> And in his hand a windy fan did bear
> That in the idle air he mov'd still here and there.
>
> And him beside march'd amorous Desire,
> Who seem'd of riper years than the other swain,
> Yet was that other swain this elder's sire,
> And gave him being, common to them twain:
> His garment was disguised very vain,
> And his embroidered bonnet sat awry;
> Twixt both his hands few sparks he close did strain,
> Which still he blew, and kindled busily,
> That soon they life conceiv'd and forth in flames did fly.
>
> Next after him went Doubt, who was yclad
> In a discolour'd coat of strange disguise,
> That at his back a broad capuccio had,
> And sleeves dependant *Albanese-wise;*
> He lookt askew with his mistrustful eyes,
> And nicely trod, as thorns lay in his way,
> Or that the floor to shrink he did avise;
> And on a broken reed he still did stay
> His feeble steps, which shrunk when hard thereon he lay.
>
> With him went Daunger, cloth'd in ragged weed,
> Made of bear's skin, that him more dreadful made;
> Yet his own face was dreadfull, ne did need
> Strange horror to deform his grisly shade;

A net in th' one hand, and a rusty blade
In th' other was ; this Mischiefe, that Mishap ;
With th' one his foes he threat'ned to invade,
With th' other he his friends meant to enwrap ;
For whom he could not kill he practiz'd to entrap.

Next him was Fear, all arm'd from top to toe,
Yet thought himselfe not safe enough thereby,
But fear'd each shadow moving to and fro ;
And his own arms when glittering he did spy
Or clashing heard, he fast away did fly,
As ashes pale of hue, and winged-heel'd ;
And evermore on Daunger fixt his eye,
'Gainst whom he always bent a brazen shield,
Which his right hand unarmed fearfully did wield.

With him went Hope in rank, a handsome maid,
Of chearfull look and lovely to behold ;
In silken samite she was light array'd,
And her fair locks were woven up in gold ;
She always smil'd, and in her hand did hold
An holy-water sprinkle dipt in dew,
With which she sprinkled favours manifold
On whom she list, and did great liking shew,
Great liking unto many, but true love to few.

Next after them, the winged God himself
Came riding on a lion ravenous,
Taught to obey the menage of that elfe
That man and beast with power imperious
Subdueth to his kingdom tyrannous :
His blindfold eyes he bade awhile unbind,
That his proud spoil of that same dolorous
Fair dame he might behold in perfect kind ;
Which seen, he much rejoiced in his cruel mind.

Of which full proud, himself uprearing high,
He looked round about with stern disdain,
And did survey his goodly company :
And marshalling the evil-ordered train,
With that the darts which his right hand did strain,
Full dreadfully he shook, that all did quake,
And clapt on high his colour'd winges twain,
That all his many it afraid did make :
Tho, blinding him again, his way he forth did take."

The description of Hope, in this series of historical portraits, is one of the most beautiful in Spenser : and the triumph of Cupid at the mischief he has made, is worthy of the malicious urchin deity. In reading these

descriptions, one can hardly avoid being reminded of Rubens's allegorical pictures; but the account of Satyrane taming the lion's whelps and lugging the bear's cubs along in his arms while yet an infant, whom his mother so naturally advises to "go seek some other play-fellows," has even more of this high picturesque character. Nobody but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it!

With all this, Spenser neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegorical play upon words, where he describes Malbecco as escaping in the herd of goats, "by the help of his fayre horns on hight." But he has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance—all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable—but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency. We need only turn, in proof of this, to the Cave of Despair, or the Cave of Mammon, or to the account of the change of Malbecco into Jealousy. The following stanzas, in the description of the Cave of Mammon, the grisly house of Plutus, are unrivalled for the portentous massiness of the forms, the splendid chiaroscuro, and shadowy horror.

"That house's form within was rude and strong,
Like an hūge cave hewn out of rocky clift,
From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hung,
Embossed with massy gold of glorious gift,
And with rich metal loaded every rift,
That heavy ruin they did seem to threat:
And over them Arachne high did lift
Her cunning web, and spread her subtle net,
Enwrapped in foul smoke, and clouds more black than jet.

Both roof and floor, and walls were all of gold,
But overgrown with dust and old decay,[1]
And hid in darkness that none could behold
The hue thereof: for view of cheerful day
Did never in that house itself display,
But a faint shadow of uncertain light;
Such as a lamp whose life doth fade away;
Or as the moon clothed with cloudy night
Does shew to him that walks in fear and sad affright.

* * * * * * * *

And over all sad Horror with grim hue
Did always soar, beating his iron wings;
And after him owls and night-ravens flew,
The hateful messengers of heavy things,
Of death and dolour telling sad tidings;
Whiles sad Celleno, sitting on a clift,
A song of bitter bale and sorrow sings,
That heart of flint asunder could have rift;
Which having ended, after him she flieth swift."

The Cave of Despair is described with equal gloominess and power of fancy; and the fine moral declamation of the owner of it, on the evils of life, almost makes one in love with death. In the story of Malbecco, who is haunted by jealousy, and in vain strives to run away from his own thoughts—

"High over hill and over dale he flies"—

the truth of human passion and the preternatural ending are equally striking.—It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakspeare, in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with Comus; and the result would not be unfavourable to Spenser. There is only one work of the same allegorical kind, which has more interest than Spenser (with scarcely less imagination): and that is the Pilgrim's Progress. The three first books of the Faery Queen are very superior to the three last. One would think that Pope, who used to ask if any one had ever

[1] "That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
Tho' they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to Dust, that is a little gilt,
More laud than gold o'er-dusted."
Troilus and Cressida.

read the Faery Queen through, had only dipped into these last. The only things in them equal to the former, are the account of Talus, the Iron Man, and the delightful episode of Pastorella.

The language of Spenser is full, and copious, to overflowing: it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was, probably, seduced into a certain license of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza from the limited resources of his native language. This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song.—Not that I would, on that account, part with the stanza of Spenser. We are, perhaps, indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later example. His versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, "in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out"—that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation—dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakspeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea: but the effect

is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.

LECTURE III

ON SHAKSPEARE AND MILTON

In looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact, than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts*, as painting, and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary, or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error, which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, &c., *i.e.* in things depending on mere inquiry and experiment, or on absolute demonstration, have been led hastily to conclude, that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological

creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth, and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay: and, inquiring no farther about the matter, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride, and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of each, of science and of art:—of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Dante, and Ariosto, (Milton alone was of a later age, and not the worse for it)—Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio, the Greek sculptors and tragedians,—all lived near the beginning of their arts—perfected, and all but created them. These giant-sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view, or lessen their brightness. In strength and stature they are unrivalled; in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after-ages, and more refined periods, (as they are called) great men have arisen, one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals; though in general the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of

an inferior order; as Tasso and Pope, among poets; Guido and Vandyke, among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters, and in constellations, never so to rise again!

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beat as high, the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood three thousand, or three hundred years ago, as they are at present: the face of nature, and "the human face divine" shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet, like that which

> "Circled Una's angel face,
> And made a sunshine in the shady place."

The four greatest names in English poetry, are almost the four first we come to—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation; while the two first, (though "the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves that they are underlings") either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of these are excluded from Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets (Shakspeare indeed is so from the dramatic form of his compositions): and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakspeare as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and

Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are ; Spenser, as we wish them to be ; Shakspeare, as they would be ; and Milton as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all : but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice ; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvellous ; in Shakspeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances ; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity ; of Spenser, remoteness ; of Milton, elevation ; of Shakspeare, every thing.—It has been said by some critic, that Shakspeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit ; that they had all his other qualities but that ; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true ; nor is the inference from it well-founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own shewing, the great distinction of Shakspeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

The striking peculiarity of Shakspeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself ; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict

of passion, or turn of thought. He had "a mind reflecting ages past," and present:—all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: "All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave," are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies "nodded to him, and did him curtesies:" and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of "his so potent art." The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, "subject to the same skyey influences," the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, "his frequent haunts and

ancient neighbourhood," are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole "coheres semblably together" in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say,—you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decypher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the bye-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, "Me and thy *crying* self," flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm—"What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows!" Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencraus and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying, "Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so." Which is explained by their answer—"My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you, whom we met on the way:"—as if while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old school-fellows from Wittenberg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth, at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not "a combination and a form" of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this: but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet's imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion,

and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader.—I may add in passing, that Shakspeare always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet; and as Ophelia had seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority.

> "*Ophelia.* My lord, as I was reading in my closet,
> Prince Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings loose,
> Ungartred, and down-gyved to his ancle,
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
> And with a look so piteous,
> As if he had been sent from hell
> To speak of horrors, thus he comes before me.
> *Polonius.* Mad for thy love!
> *Oph.* My lord, I do not know,
> But truly I do fear it.
> *Pol.* What said he?
> *Oph.* He took me by the wrist, and held me hard,
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
> And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
> He falls to such perusal of my face,
> As he would draw it: long staid he so;
> At last, a little shaking of my arm,
> And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
> He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
> As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
> And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
> And with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
> He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
> For out of doors he went without their help,
> And to the last bended their light on me."
>
> *Act. II. Scene* 1.

How after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace and bewildered melancholy any one can play Hamlet, as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare, and antic right-angled sharp-pointed gestures, it is difficult to say, unless it be that Hamlet is not bound, by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia. The account of Ophelia's death begins thus:

> "There is a willow hanging o'er a brook,
> That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream."—

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear "hoary" in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence:—"He's speaking now, or murmuring, where's my serpent of old Nile?" How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight, "It is my birth-day; I had thought to have held it poor: but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra." What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact.—That which, perhaps, more than any thing else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakspeare from all others, is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make

remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it: so the dialogues in Shakspeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, every thing has a life, a place, and being of its own!

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate *traits* brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision; but that preserve the same unaltered air and attitude. Shakspeare's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action, where every nerve and muscle is displayed in the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakspeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakspeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakespeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternative affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact

with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imagination, "nigh sphered in Heaven," claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired and kept his state alone, "playing with wisdom;" while Shakspeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host, "to make society the sweeter welcome."

The passion in Shakspeare is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feeling or sentiment preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding every thing to itself; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will; irritated by obstacles or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstacy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process. Thus after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous suggestions on the mind of Othello, "which, with a little act upon the blood, will work like mines of sulphur," he adds—

> "Look where he comes! not poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the East,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou ow'dst yesterday."—

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge! The

whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in Lear, in Macbeth, that between Brutus and Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakspeare, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different; it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakspeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while in the still pauses of the blast, we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, "while rage with rage doth sympathise:" the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fills us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain objects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hang over our heads wherever we go, and "in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust, and all our cares forgotten," affect us in the same way. Thus Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye of that vast

luminary is upon him, like the eye of heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic, in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things, as the heroic does from human passion, but in theory they are distinct.—When Richard II. calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation : " Oh, that I were a mockery-king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke," we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of regal splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan :

> "————His form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
> Of glory obscur'd ; "—

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility ; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakspeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an unmanly triumph over

fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, any thing superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world, they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. "With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again."—

Shakspeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. "It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes; or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, "puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of Troilus and Cressida. Æneas says to Agamemnon,

> "I ask that I may waken reverence,
> And on the cheek be ready with a blush
> Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
> The youthful Phœbus."

Ulysses urging Achilles to shew himself in the field, says—

> "No man is the lord of any thing,
> Till he communicate his parts to others:

Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
Till he behold them formed in the applause,
Where they're extended! which like an arch reverberates
The voice again, or like a gate of steel,
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
Its figure and its heat."

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice.

"Rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane
Be shook to air."

Shakspeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words: they come winged at his bidding; and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat, on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination, fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases, than the syllables of which they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakspeare, any other word but the true one, is sure to be wrong. If any body, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description,

"———— Light thickens,
And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood,"

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however,

are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakspeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical, and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's apology to the senate, relating "his whole course of love," with some of the preceding parts relating to his appointment, and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, "the business of the state does him offence."—His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy, crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion—from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

> "——— Of ditties highly penned,
> Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
> With ravishing division to her lute."

It is the only blank verse in the language, except Milton's, that for itself is readable. It is not stately and uniformly swelling like his, but varied and broken by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course,

> "And so by many winding nooks it strays,
> With willing sport to the wild ocean."

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakspeare. They are not so many or so great as they have been represented; what they are, are chiefly owing to the following causes:—The universality of his genius was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works; the variety of his resources, sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He might be said to combine the powers of Æschylus and Aristophanes, of Dante and Rabelais, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places; he is in earnest throughout only in Timon, Macbeth, and Lear. Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view

to stimulate his efforts, and by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the "great vulgar and the small," in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and her maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about Voltaire's criticisms. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things; and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself. His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography, not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the stream of common taste and opinion: he rose above it by his own buoyancy, and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and "his delights did shew most dolphin-like."

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakspeare was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much of a gentleman.

Shakspeare discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation; he had none of the bigotry of his age, and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses; a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew

theocracy, and of a perfect commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination; so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius, as he did to the exercise of virtue, or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet, vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome;—

> "Blind Thamyris, and blind Mæonides,
> And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old."

He had a high standard, with which he was always comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition. He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart, in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might distract its purposes or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. "With darkness and with dangers compassed round," he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, "piling up every stone of lustre from the brook," for the delight and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. "For after," he says, "I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences as my age could suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that whether aught was imposed upon me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live; but much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less

to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. The accomplishment of these intentions, which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself any thing worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet, I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed this much beforehand; but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasant solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

So that of Spenser:

> "The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,
> And is with child of glorious great intent,
> Can never rest until it forth have brought
> The eternal brood of glory excellent."

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty; loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at them; and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation, that "makes Ossa like a wart." In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakspeare, scarcely any.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shews the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has the effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures.

> "Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
> Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
> Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams."

The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.

And again:

> "As when a vulture on Imaus bred,
> Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,

> Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
> To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanling kids
> On hills where flocks are fed, flies towards the springs
> Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;
> But on his way lights on the barren plains
> Of Sericana, where Chineses drive
> With sails and wind their cany waggons light."

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness with which he describes visible objects, was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind, after the privation of his sight; but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions which occur in his early poems. In Lycidas he speaks of "the great vision of the guarded mount," with that preternatural weight of impression with which it would present itself suddenly to "the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff:" and the lines in the Penseroso, describing "the wandering moon,

> "Riding near her highest noon,
> Like one that had been led astray
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way,"

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably deficient in other respects. But Milton's poetry is not cast in any such narrow, commonplace mould; it is not so barren of resources. His worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises "like a steam of rich distilled perfumes;"

we hear the pealing organ, but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye, because it is more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this, as a characteristic power of his mind, is, that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, &c. are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the ideas of sculpture. As an instance, take the following:

"———————— He soon
Saw within ken a glorious Angel stand,
The same whom John saw also in the sun:
His back was turned, but not his brightness hid;
Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind
Illustrious on his shoulders fledge with wings
Lay waving round; on some great charge employ'd
He seem'd, or fix'd in cogitation deep.
Glad was the spirit impure, as now in hope
To find who might direct his wand'ring flight
To Paradise, the happy seat of man,
His journey's end, and our beginning woe.
But first he casts to change his proper shape,
Which else might work him danger or delay:
And now a stripling cherub he appears,
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
Suitable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd:
Under a coronet his flowing hair
In curls on either cheek play'd; wings he wore
Of many a colour'd plume sprinkled with gold,
His habit fit for speed succinct, and held
Before his decent steps a silver wand."

The figures introduced here have all the elegance and precision of a Greek statue: glossy and impurpled, tinged with golden light, and musical as the strings of Memnon's harp!

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub :

> "With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
> The weight of mightiest monarchies:"

Or the comparison of Satan, as he "lay floating many a rood," to "that sea beast,"

> "Leviathan, which God of all his works
> Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream!"

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression! What an idea it conveys of the size of that hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing! Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellences. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugners, is to take down the book and read it.

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakspeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the Paradise Lost as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case ; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together, (with the exception already mentioned.) Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza writers, as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there any thing like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical to those of musical rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

The following are some of the finest instances :

"——————— His hand was known
In Heaven by many a tower'd structure high ;—
Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
In ancient Greece : and in the Ausonian land
Men called him Mulciber : and how he fell
From Heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o'er the chrystal battlements ; from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day ; and with the setting sun
Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
On Lemnos, the Ægean isle : thus they relate,
Erring."—

"——— But chief the spacious hall
Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
Brush'd with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
In clusters ; they among fresh dews and flow'rs
Fly to and fro : or on the smoothed plank,
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
New rubb'd with balm, expatiate and confer
Their state affairs. So thick the airy crowd
Swarm'd and were straiten'd ; till the signal giv'n,
Behold a wonder ! They but now who seem'd
In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race
Beyond the Indian mount, or fairy elves,
Whose midnight revels by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while over-head the moon
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
Wheels her pale course : they on their mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund music charm his ear ;
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds."

I can only give another instance, though I have some difficulty in leaving off.

"Round he surveys (and well might, where he stood
So high above the circling canopy
Of night's extended shade) from th' eastern point
Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
Beyond the horizon : then from pole to pole
He views in breadth, and without longer pause
Down right into the world's first region throws

His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
Through the pure marble air his oblique way
Amongst innumerable stars that shone
Stars distant, but nigh hand seem'd other worlds;
Or other worlds they seem'd or happy isles," &c.

The verse, in this exquisitely modulated passage, floats up and down as if it had itself wings. Milton has himself given us the theory of his versification—

"Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out."

Dr. Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's,—Thomson's, Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's,—and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into "the hidden soul of harmony," to be mere lumbering prose.

To proceed to a consideration of the merits of Paradise Lost, in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellences; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in Heaven, where, as Pope justly observes, "God the Father turns a school-divine;" nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton's pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring ambition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmixed sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like two massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings, who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the

universe ; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest ; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body ; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom, and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower ; or

> " ——————— As when Heaven's fire
> Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines."

He was still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach ; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from Heaven, Hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey.

> " All is not lost ; th' unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield,
> And what else is not to be overcome,"

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it ; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride ; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought, by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil—but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt

for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him ; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of "that intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity," though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to "being swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night." He expresses the sum and substance of all ambition in one line. "Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering!" After such a conflict as his, and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something ; but he does more than this—he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline ; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct ; the Titans were not more vast ; Prometheus chained to his rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, "rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air," it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images : so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed—but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will ; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the bye-tricks of a hump and cloven foot ; to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality

too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in religion, and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

Not only the figure of Satan, but his speeches in council, his soliloquies, his address to Eve, his share in the war in heaven, or in the fall of man, shew the same decided superiority of character. To give only one instance, almost the first speech he makes:

> "Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
> Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
> That we must change for Heaven; this mournful gloom
> For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
> Who now is sov'rain can dispose and bid
> What shall be right: farthest from him is best,
> Whom reason hath equal'd, force hath made supreme
> Above his equals. Farewell happy fields,
> Where joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell,
> Receive thy new possessor; one who brings
> A mind not to be chang'd by place or time.
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
> What matter where, if I be still the same,
> And what I should be, all but less than he
> Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
> We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
> Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
> Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
> To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
> Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."

The whole of the speeches and debates in Pandemonium are well worthy of the place and the occasion—with Gods for speakers, and angels and archangels for hearers. There is a decided manly tone in the arguments and sentiments, an eloquent dogmatism, as if each person spoke from thorough conviction; an excellence which Milton probably borrowed from his spirit of partisanship, or else his spirit of partisanship from the natural firmness and vigour of his mind. In this respect Milton resembles Dante, (the only modern writer with whom he has any

thing in common) and it is remarkable that Dante, as well as Milton, was a political partisan. That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, and which is chiefly to be met with in these bitter invectives, is one of its great excellences. The author might here turn his philippics against Salmasius to good account. The rout in Heaven is like the fall of some mighty structure, nodding to its base, "with hideous ruin and combustion down." But, perhaps, of all the passages in Paradise Lost, the description of the employments of the angels during the absence of Satan, some of whom "retreated in a silent valley, sing with notes angelical to many a harp their own heroic deeds and hapless fall by doom of battle," is the most perfect example of mingled pathos and sublimity.—What proves the truth of this noble picture in every part, and that the frequent complaint of want of interest in it is the fault of the reader, not of the poet, is that when any interest of a practical kind take a shape that can be at all turned into this, (and there is little doubt that Milton had some such in his eye in writing it,) each party converts it to its own purposes, feels the absolute identity of these abstracted and high speculations; and that, in fact, a noted political writer of the present day has exhausted nearly the whole account of Satan in the Paradise Lost, by applying it to a character whom he considered as after the devil, (though I do not know whether he would make even that exception) the greatest enemy of the human race. This may serve to shew that Milton's Satan is not a very insipid personage.

Of Adam and Eve it has been said, that the ordinary reader can feel little interest in them, because they have none of the passions, pursuits, or even relations of human life, except that of man and wife, the least interesting of all others, if not to the parties concerned, at least to the by-standers. The preference has on this account been given to Homer, who, it is said, has left very vivid and infinitely diversified pictures of all the passions

and affections, public and private, incident to human nature—the relations of son, of brother, parent, friend, citizen, and many others. Longinus preferred the Iliad to the Odyssey, on account of the greater number of battles it contains; but I can neither agree to his criticism, nor assent to the present objection. It is true, there is little action in this part of Milton's poem; but there is much repose, and more enjoyment. There are none of the every-day occurrences, contentions, disputes, wars, fightings, feuds, jealousies, trades, professions, liveries, and common handicrafts of life; "no kind of traffic; letters are not known; no use of service, of riches, poverty, contract, succession, bourne, bound of land, tilth, vineyard none; no occupation, no treason, felony, sword, pike, knife, gun, nor need of any engine." So much the better; thank Heaven, all these were yet to come. But still the die was cast, and in them our doom was sealed. In them

> "The generations were prepared; the pangs,
> The internal pangs, were ready, the dread strife
> Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny."

In their first false step we trace all our future woe, with loss of Eden. But there was a short and precious interval between, like the first blush of morning before the day is overcast with tempest, the dawn of the world, the birth of nature from "the unapparent deep," with its first dews and freshness on its cheek, breathing odours. Theirs was the first delicious taste of life, and on them depended all that was to come of it. In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment and enraptured with one another, with the voice of their Maker walking in the garden, and ministering angels attendant on their steps, winged messengers from heaven like rosy clouds descending in their sight. Nature played around them her virgin fancies wild; and spread for them a repast where no crude surfeit reigned. Was there nothing in this

scene, which God and nature alone witnessed, to interest a modern critic? What need was there of action, where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it! They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness, and "know to know no more." "They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed with fresh beauty in their sight. They tasted as it were for themselves and us, of all that there ever was pure in human bliss. "In them the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, is lightened." They stood awhile perfect, but they afterwards fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness as they had done of bliss. But their pangs were such as a pure spirit might feel at the sight—their tears "such as angels weep." The pathos is of that mild contemplative kind which arises from regret for the loss of unspeakable happiness, and resignation to inevitable fate. There is none of the fierceness of intemperate passion, none of the agony of mind and turbulence of action, which is the result of the habitual struggles of the will with circumstances, irritated by repeated disappointment, and constantly setting its desires most eagerly on that which there is an impossibility of attaining. This would have destroyed the beauty of the whole picture. They had received their unlooked-for happiness as a free gift from their Creator's hands, and they submitted to its loss, not without sorrow, but without impious and stubborn repining.

> "In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
> Our ling'ring parents, and to th' eastern gate
> Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
> To the subjected plain; then disappeared.
> They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
> Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
> Wav'd over by that flaming brand, the gate
> With dreadful faces throng'd, and fiery arms:
> Some natural tears they dropt, but wip'd them soon;
> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide."

LECTURE IV

ON DRYDEN AND POPE

Dryden and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language, as the poets of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton, were of the natural; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class, ought, perhaps, to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. They have a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of excellence which existed equally nowhere else. What has been done well by some later writers of the highest style of poetry, is included in, and obscured by a greater degree of power and genius in those before them: what has been done best by poets of an entirely distinct turn of mind, stands by itself, and tells for its whole amount. Young, for instance, Gray, or Akenside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakspeare: Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place in the lists of fame. This seems to be not only the reason of the thing, but the common sense of mankind, who, without any regular process of reflection, judge of the merit of a work, not more by its inherent and absolute worth, than by its originality and capacity of gratifying a different faculty of the mind, or a different class of readers; for it should be recollected, that there may be readers (as well as poets) not of the highest class, though very good sort of people, and not altogether to be despised.

The question, whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose-writer, that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties, and of the most refined taste;

and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If, indeed, by a great poet, we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet ; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clean contrary way ; namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his Critical Essays ; or in representing them in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his Satires ; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of Fancy ; or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of expression, and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his Epistles. He was not then distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart ; but he was a wit, and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, a refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art ; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make it out, is this—The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men ; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature ; to be identified with and to foreknow and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions ; and to exert the same power over the

minds of his readers, that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakspeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their maker. The power of the imagination in them, is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art; he judged of beauty by fashion; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakspeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all possible circumstances: Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety, but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden, than on the garden of Eden; he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person, better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven—a piece of cut glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect, than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more delighted with a patent lamp, than with "the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow," that fills the skies with its soft silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him, was the greatest; the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the

natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw, than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade-dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased; and because while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity, or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry; he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

It cannot be denied, that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing, than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them; in describing a row of pins and needles, rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans; in penning a lampoon or a compliment, and in praising Martha Blount.

Shakspeare says,

> "———— In Fortune's ray and brightness
> The herd hath more annoyance by the brize
> Than by the tyger: but when the splitting wind
> Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
> And flies fled under shade, why then
> The thing of courage,
> As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise;
> And with an accent tuned in the self-same key,
> Replies to chiding Fortune."

There is none of this rough work in Pope. His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his

smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries; its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms; for "the gnarled oak," he gives us "the soft myrtle:" for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot, or the fall of a china jar; for the tug and war of the elements, or the deadly strife of the passions, we have

> "Calm contemplation and poetic ease."

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where every thing assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to every thing, but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to be most pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man, without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works.—The Rape of the Lock is the best or most ingenious of these. It is the most exquisite specimen of *fillagree* work ever invented. It is admirable in proportion as it is made of nothing.

> "More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
> Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
> Of scorched dew, do not in th' air more lightly flee."

It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to every thing, to paste, pomatum, billet-doux, and patches. Airs, languid airs, breathe around;—the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilette is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the Goddess of vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No

pains are spared, no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction, to set off the meanest things. The balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity, is as nicely trimmed as the balance of power in Europe. The little is made great, and the great little. You hardly know whether to laugh or weep. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic! I will give only the two following passages in illustration of these remarks. Can any thing be more elegant and graceful than the description of Belinda, in the beginning of the second canto?

> "Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,
> The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
> Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
> Launch'd on the bosom of the silver Thames.
> Fair nymphs, and well-drest youths around her shone,
> But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.
> On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
> Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.
> Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
> Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those:
> Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
> Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
> Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike;
> And like the sun, they shine on all alike.
> Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
> Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:
> If to her share some female errors fall,
> Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.
>
> This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
> Nourish'd two locks, which graceful hung behind
> In equal curls, and well-conspired to deck
> With shining ringlets the sweet iv'ry neck."

The following is the introduction to the account of Belinda's assault upon the baron bold, who had dissevered one of these locks "from her fair head for ever and for ever."

> "Now meet thy fate, incens'd Belinda cry'd,
> And drew a deadly bodkin from her side.
> (The same his ancient personage to deck,
> Her great, great grandsire wore about his neck,
> In three seal-rings; which after, melted down,
> Form'd a vast buckle for his widow's gown:

Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew ;
Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs,
Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)"

I do not know how far Pope was indebted for the original idea, or the delightful execution of this poem, to the Lutrin of Boileau.

The Rape of the Lock is a double-refined essence of wit and fancy, as the Essay on Criticism is of wit and sense. The quantity of thought and observation in this work, for so young a man as Pope was when he wrote it, is wonderful : unless we adopt the supposition, that most men of genius spend the rest of their lives in teaching others what they themselves have learned under twenty. The conciseness and felicity of the expression are equally remarkable. Thus in reasoning on the variety of men's opinion, he says—

"'Tis with our judgments, as our watches ; none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

Nothing can be more original and happy than the general remarks and illustrations in the Essay: the critical rules laid down are too much those of a school, and of a confined one. There is one passage in the Essay on Criticism in which the author speaks with that eloquent enthusiasm of the fame of ancient writers, which those will always feel who have themselves any hope or chance of immortality. I have quoted the passage elsewhere, but I will repeat it here.

"Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands ;
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
Destructive war, and all-involving age.
Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise !
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow."

These lines come with double force and beauty on the reader, as they were dictated by the writer's despair of ever attaining that lasting glory which he celebrates with such disinterested enthusiasm in others, from the lateness of the age in which he lived, and from his writing in a tongue, not understood by other nations, and that grows

obsolete and unintelligible to ourselves at the end of every second century. But he needed not have thus antedated his own poetical doom—the loss and entire oblivion of that which can never die. If he had known, he might have boasted that "his little bark" wafted down the stream of time,

> "———— With *theirs* should sail,
> Pursue the triumph and partake the gale"—

if those who know how to set a due value on the blessing, were not the last to decide confidently on their own pretensions to it.

There is a cant in the present day about genius, as every thing in poetry: there was a cant in the time of Pope about sense, as performing all sorts of wonders. It was a kind of watchword, the shibboleth of a critical party of the day. As a proof of the exclusive attention which it occupied in their minds, it is remarkable that in the Essay on Criticism (not a very long poem) there are no less than half a score successive couplets rhyming to the word *sense*. This appears almost incredible without giving the instances, and no less so when they are given.

> "But of the two, less dangerous is the offence,
> To tire our patience than mislead our sense."—*lines* 3, 4.
>
> "In search of wit these lose their common sense,
> And then turn critics in their own defence."—*l.* 28, 29.
>
> "Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
> And fills up all the mighty void of sense.—*l.* 209, 10.
>
> "Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
> Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense.—*l.* 324, 5.
>
> "'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
> The sound must seem an echo to the sense."—*l.* 364, 5.
>
> "At every trifle scorn to take offence;
> That always shews great pride, or little sense."—*l.* 386, 7.
>
> "Be silent always, when you doubt your sense,
> And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence."— *l.* 366, 7.
>
> "Be niggards of advice on no pretence,
> For the worst avarice is that of sense."—*l.* 578, 9.
>
> "Strain out the last dull dropping of their sense,
> And rhyme with all the rage of impotence."—*l.* 608, 9.
>
> "Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
> And without method talks us into sense."—*l.* 653, 4.

I have mentioned this the more for the sake of those critics who are bigotted idolisers of our author, chiefly on the score of his correctness. These persons seem to be of opinion that "there is but one perfect writer, even Pope." This is, however, a mistake: his excellence is by no means faultlessness. If he had no great faults, he is full of little errors. His grammatical construction is often lame and imperfect. In the Abelard and Eloise, he says—

"There died the best of passions, Love and Fame."

This is not a legitimate ellipsis. Fame is not a passion, though love is: but his ear was evidently confused by the meeting of the sounds "love and fame," as if they of themselves immediately implied "love, and love of fame." Pope's rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear; and this to a greater degree, not only than in later, but than in preceding writers. The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony. In the translation of the Iliad, which has been considered as his masterpiece in style and execution, he continually changes the tenses in the same sentence for the purposes of the rhyme, which shews either a want of technical resources, or great inattention to punctilious exactness. But to have done with this.

The epistle of Eloise to Abelard is the only exception I can think of, to the general spirit of the foregoing remarks; and I should be disingenuous not to acknowledge that it is an exception. The foundation is in the letters themselves of Abelard and Eloise, which are quite as impressive, but still in a different way. It is fine as a poem: it is finer as a piece of high-wrought eloquence. No woman could be supposed to write a better love-letter in verse. Besides the richness of the historical materials, the high *gusto* of the original sentiments which Pope had to work upon, there were perhaps circumstances in his own situation which made him enter into the subject with even more than a poet's feeling. The tears shed are drops gushing from the heart: the words are burning sighs

breathed from the soul of love. Perhaps the poem to which it bears the greatest similarity in our language, is Dryden's Tancred and Sigismunda, taken from Boccaccio. Pope's Eloise will bear this comparison ; and after such a test, with Boccaccio for the original author, and Dryden for the translator, it need shrink from no other. There is something exceedingly tender and beautiful in the sound of the concluding lines :

> " If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
> To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs," &c.

The Essay on Man is not Pope's best work. It is a theory which Bolingbroke is supposed to have given him, and which he expanded into verse. But " he spins the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument." All that he says, " the very words, and to the self-same tune," would prove just as well that whatever is, is *wrong*, as that whatever is, is *right*. The Dunciad has splendid passages, but in general it is dull, heavy, and mechanical. The sarcasm already quoted on Settle, the Lord Mayor's poet, (for at that time there was a city as well as a court poet)

> " Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more "—

is the finest inversion of immortality conceivable. It is even better than his serious apostrophe to the great heirs of glory, the triumphant bards of antiquity!

The finest burst of severe moral invective in all Pope, is the prophetical conclusion of the epilogue to the Satires :

> " Virtue may chuse the high or low degree,
> 'Tis just alike to virtue, and to me ;
> Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,
> She's still the same belov'd, contented thing.
> Vice is undone if she forgets her birth,
> And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth.
> But 'tis the Fall degrades her to a whore :
> Let Greatness own her, and she's mean no more.
> Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,
> Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless ;
> In golden chains the willing world she draws,
> And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws ;
> Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,
> And sees pale Virtue carted in her stead.

Lo ! at the wheels of her triumphal car,
Old England's Genius, rough with many a scar,
Dragg'd in the dust ! his arms hang idly round,
His flag inverted trains along the ground !
Our youth, all livery'd o'er with foreign gold,
Before her dance ; behind her, crawl the old !
See thronging millions to the Pagod run,
And offer country, parent, wife, or son !
Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim,
That *not to be corrupted is the shame.*
In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in pow'r,
'Tis av'rice all, ambition is no more !
See all our nobles begging to be slaves !
See all our fools aspiring to be knaves !
The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
Are what ten thousand envy and adore :
All, all look up with reverential awe,
At crimes that 'scape or triumph o'er the law ;
While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry :
Nothing is sacred now but villainy.
Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)
Show there was one who held it in disdain."

His Satires are not in general so good as his Epistles. His enmity is effeminate and petulant from a sense of weakness, as his friendship was tender from a sense of gratitude. I do not like, for instance, his character of Chartres, or his characters of women. His delicacy often borders upon sickliness ; his fastidiousness makes others fastidious. But his compliments are divine ; they are equal in value to a house or an estate. Take the following. In addressing Lord Mansfield, he speaks of the grave as a scene,

"Where Murray, long enough his country's pride,
Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde."

To Bolingbroke he says—

"Why rail they then if but one wreath of mine,
Oh all-accomplish'd St. John, deck thy shrine ?"

Again, he has bequeathed this praise to Lord Cornbury—

"Despise low thoughts, low gains :
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains ;
Be virtuous and be happy for your pains."

One would think (though there is no knowing) that a descendant of this nobleman, if there be such a person living, could hardly be guilty of a mean or paltry action.

The finest piece of personal satire in Pope (perhaps in the world) is his character of Addison; and this, it may be observed, is of a mixed kind, made up of his respect for the man, and a cutting sense of his failings. The other finest one is that of Buckingham, and the best part of that is the pleasurable.

> "—— Alas! how changed from him,
> That life of pleasure and that soul of whim:
> Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
> The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love!"

Among his happiest and most inimitable effusions are the Epistles to Arbuthnot, and to Jervas the painter; amiable patterns of the delightful unconcerned life, blending ease with dignity, which poets and painters then led. Thus he says to Arbuthnot—

> "Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
> Dipp'd me in ink, my parents' or my own?
> As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
> I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.
> I left no calling for this idle trade,
> No duty broke, no father disobey'd:
> The muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not wife;
> To help me through this long disease, my life?
> To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,
> And teach the being you preserv'd to bear.
>
> But why then publish? Granville the polite,
> And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;
> Well-natur'd Garth inflam'd with early praise,
> And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd my lays;
> The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read;
> E'en mitred Rochester would nod the head;
> And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
> With open arms receiv'd one poet more.
> Happy my studies, when by these approv'd!
> Happier their author, when by these belov'd!
> From these the world will judge of men and books,
> Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks."

I cannot help giving also the conclusion of the Epistle to Jervas.

> "Oh, lasting as those colours may they shine,
> Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line;
> New graces yearly like thy works display,
> Soft without weakness, without glaring gay;

> Led by some rule, that guides, but not constrains;
> And finish'd more through happiness than pains.
> The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
> One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
> Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
> And breathe an air divine on ev'ry face;
> Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
> Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul;
> With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,
> And these be sung till Granville's Myra die:
> Alas! how little from the grave we claim!
> Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name."

And shall we cut ourselves off from beauties like these with a theory? Shall we shut up our books, and seal up our senses, to please the dull spite and inordinate vanity of those "who have eyes, but they see not—ears, but they hear not—and understandings, but they understand not,"—and go about asking our blind guides, whether Pope was a poet or not? It will never do. Such persons, when you point out to them a fine passage in Pope, turn it off to something of the same sort in some other writer. Thus they say that the line, "I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came," is pretty, but taken from that of Ovid—*Et quum conabar scribere, versus erat.* They are safe in this mode of criticism: there is no danger of any one's tracing their writings to the classics.

Pope's letters and prose writings neither take away from, nor add to his poetical reputation. There is, occasionally, a littleness of manner, and an unnecessary degree of caution. He appears anxious to say a good thing in every word, as well as every sentence. They, however, give a very favourable idea of his moral character in all respects; and his letters to Atterbury, in his disgrace and exile, do equal honour to both. If I had to choose, there are one or two persons, and but one or two, that I should like to have been better than Pope!

Dryden was a better prose-writer, and a bolder and more varied versifier than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a more correct and logical declaimer, and had more of what may be called strength of mind than Pope; but he had not the same refinement and delicacy

of feeling. Dryden's eloquence and spirit were possessed in a higher degree by others, and in nearly the same degree by Pope himself; but that by which Pope was distinguished, was an essence which he alone possessed, and of incomparable value on that sole account. Dryden's Epistles are excellent, but inferior to Pope's, though they appear (particularly the admirable one to Congreve) to have been the model on which the latter formed his. His Satires are better than Pope's. His Absalom and Achitophel is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to any thing of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine; and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice.

Mac Flecknoe is the origin of the idea of the Dunciad; but it is less elaborately constructed, less feeble, and less heavy. The difference between Pope's satirical portraits and Dryden's, appears to be this in a good measure, that Dryden seems to grapple with his antagonists, and to describe real persons; Pope seems to refine upon them in his own mind, and to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the mere driveling effusions of his spleen and malice. Pope describes the thing, and then goes on describing his own description till he loses himself in verbal repetitions. Dryden recurs to the object often, takes fresh sittings of nature, and gives us new strokes of character as well as of his pencil. The Hind and Panther is an allegory as well as a satire; and so far it tells less home; the battery is not so point-blank. But otherwise it has more genius, vehemence, and strength of description than any other of Dryden's works, not excepting the Absalom and Achitophel. It also contains the finest examples of varied and sounding versification. I will quote the following as an instance of what I mean. He is complaining of the treatment which the Papists, under James II., received from the church of England.

> "Besides these jolly birds, whose corpse impure
> Repaid their commons with their salt manure,

Another farm he had behind his house,
Not overstocked, but barely for his use;
Wherein his poor domestic poultry fed,
And from his pious hand "received their bread."
Our pampered pigeons, with malignant eyes,
Beheld these inmates, and their nurseries;
Though hard their fare, at evening, and at morn,
(A cruise of water, and an ear of corn,)
Yet still they grudged that *modicum*, and thought
A sheaf in every single grain was brought.
Fain would they filch that little food away,
While unrestrained those happy gluttons prey;
And much they grieved to see so nigh their hall,
The bird that warned St. Peter of his fall;
That he should raise his mitred crest on high,
And clap his wings, and call his family
To sacred rites; and vex the ethereal powers
With midnight mattins at uncivil hours;
Nay more, his quiet neighbours should molest,
Just in the sweetness of their morning rest.
Beast of a bird! supinely when he might
Lie snug and sleep, to rise before the light!
What if his dull forefathers us'd that cry,
Could he not let a bad example die?
The world was fallen into an easier way:
This age knew better than to fast and pray.
Good sense in sacred worship would appear,
So to begin as they might end the year.
Such feats in former times had wrought the falls
Of crowing chanticleers in cloister'd walls.
Expell'd for this, and for their lands they fled;
And sister Partlet with her hooded head
Was hooted hence, because she would not pray a-bed."

There is a magnanimity of abuse in some of these epithets, a fearless choice of topics of invective, which may be considered as the heroical in satire.

The *Annus Mirabilis* is a tedious performance; it is a tissue of far-fetched, heavy, lumbering conceits, and in the worst style of what has been denominated metaphysical poetry. His Odes in general are of the same stamp; they are the hard-strained offspring of a meagre, meretricious fancy. The famous Ode on St. Cecilia deserves its reputation; for, as a piece of poetical mechanism to be set to music, or recited in alternate strophe and antistrophe, with classical allusions, and flowing verse, nothing can be

better. It is equally fit to be said or sung; it is not equally good to read. It is lyrical, without being epic or dramatic. For instance, the description of Bacchus,

> "The jolly god in triumph comes,
> Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
> Flush'd with a purple grace,
> He shews his honest face"—

does not answer, as it ought, to our idea of the God, returning from the conquest of India, with satyrs and wild beasts, that he had tamed, following in his train; crowned with vine leaves, and riding in a chariot drawn by leopards—such as we have seen him painted by Titian or Rubens! Lyrical poetry, of all others, bears the nearest resemblance to painting: it deals in hieroglyphics and passing figures, which depend for effect, not on the working out, but on the selection. It is the dance and pantomime of poetry. In variety and rapidity of movement, the Alexander's Feast has all that can be required in this respect; it only wants loftiness and truth of character.

Dryden's plays are better than Pope could have written; for though he does not go out of himself by the force of imagination, he goes out of himself by the force of common-places and rhetorical dialogue. On the other hand, they are not so good as Shakspeare's; but he has left the best character of Shakspeare that has ever been written.[1]

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[1] "To begin then with Shakspeare: he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned: he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say, he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say, he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter Viburna Cupressi."

His alterations from Chaucer and Boccaccio shew a greater knowledge of the taste of his readers and power of pleasing them, than acquaintance with the genius of his authors. He ekes out the lameness of the verse in the former, and breaks the force of the passion in both. The Tancred and Sigismunda is the only general exception, in which, I think, he has fully retained, if not improved upon, the impassioned declamation of the original. The Honoria has none of the bewildered, dreary, preternatural effect of Boccaccio's story. Nor has the Flower and the Leaf any thing of the enchanting simplicity and concentrated feeling of Chaucer's romantic fiction. Dryden, however, sometimes seemed to indulge himself as well as his readers, as in keeping entire that noble line in Palamon's address to Venus :

"Thou gladder of the mount of Cithæron!"

His Tales have been, upon the whole, the most popular of his works; and I should think that a translation of some of the other serious tales in Boccaccio and Chaucer, as that of Isabella, the Falcon, of Constance, the Prioress's Tale, and others, if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature, that poetry had, at the period of which we are speaking, in general declined, by successive gradations, from the poetry of imagination, in the time of Elizabeth, to the poetry of fancy (to adopt a modern distinction) in the time of Charles I.; and again from the poetry of fancy to that of wit, as in the reign of Charles II. and Queen Anne. It degenerated into the poetry of mere common places, both in style and thought, in the succeeding reigns : as in the latter part of the last century, it was transformed, by means of the French Revolution, into the poetry of paradox.

Of Donne I know nothing but some beautiful verses to his wife, dissuading her from accompanying him on his travels abroad, and some quaint riddles in verse, which the Sphinx could not unravel.

Waller still lives in the name of Sacharissa ; and his

lines on the death of Oliver Cromwell shew that he was a man not without genius and strength of thought.

Marvel is a writer of nearly the same period, and worthy of a better age. Some of his verses are harsh, as the words of Mercury; others musical, as in Apollo's lute. Of the latter kind are his boat-song, his description of a fawn, and his lines to Lady Vere. His lines prefixed to Paradise Lost are by no means the most favourable specimen of his powers.

Butler's Hudibras is a poem of more wit than any other in the language. The rhymes have as much genius in them as the thoughts; but there is no story in it, and but little humour. Humour is the making others act or talk absurdly and unconsciously: wit is the pointing out and ridiculing that absurdity consciously, and with more or less ill-nature. The fault of Butler's poem is not that it has too much wit, but that it has not an equal quantity of other things. One would suppose that the starched manners and sanctified grimace of the times in which he lived, would of themselves have been sufficiently rich in ludicrous incidents and characters; but they seem rather to have irritated his spleen, than to have drawn forth his powers of picturesque imitation. Certainly if we compare Hudibras with Don Quixote in this respect, it seems rather a meagre and unsatisfactory performance.

Rochester's poetry is the poetry of wit combined with the love of pleasure, of thought with licentiousness. His extravagant heedless levity has a sort of passionate enthusiasm in it; his contempt for every thing that others respect, almost amounts to sublimity. His poem upon Nothing is itself no trifling work. His epigrams were the bitterest, the least laboured, and the truest, that ever were written.

Sir John Suckling was of the same mercurial stamp, but with a greater fund of animal spirits; as witty, but less malicious. His Ballad on a Wedding is perfect in its kind, and has a spirit of high enjoyment in it, of sportive fancy, a liveliness of description, and a truth of nature, that never were surpassed. It is superior to either Gay

or Prior ; for with all their *naïveté* and terseness, it has a Shakspearian grace and luxuriance about it, which they could not have reached.

Denham and Cowley belong to the same period, but were quite distinct from each other : the one was grave and prosing, the other melancholy and fantastical. There are a number of good lines and good thoughts in the Cooper's Hill. And in Cowley there is an inexhaustible fund of sense and ingenuity, buried in inextricable conceits, and entangled in the cobwebs of the schools. He was a great man, not a great poet. But I shall say no more on this subject. I never wish to meddle with names that are sacred, unless when they stand in the way of things that are more sacred.

Withers is a name now almost forgotten, and his works seldom read ; but his poetry is not unfrequently distinguished by a tender and pastoral turn of thought ; and there is one passage of exquisite feeling, describing the consolations of poetry in the following terms :

"She doth tell me where to borrow
Comfort in the midst of sorrow ;
Makes the desolatest place [1]
To her presence be a grace ;
And the blackest discontents
Be her fairest ornaments.
In my former days of bliss
Her divine skill taught me this,
That from every thing I saw,
I could some invention draw ;
And raise pleasure to her height,
Through the meanest object's sight,
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rusteling,
By a daisy whose leaves spread
Shut when Titan goes to bed ;
Or a shady bush or tree,
She could more infuse in me,
Than all Nature's beauties can,
In some other wiser man.
By her help I also now
Make this churlish place allow

[1] Written in the Fleet Prison.

Some things that may sweeten gladness
In the very gall of sadness.
The dull loneness, the black shade,
That these hanging vaults have made,
The strange music of the waves,
Beating on these hollow caves,
This black den which rocks emboss,
Overgrown with eldest moss,
The rude portals that give light
More to terror than delight,
This my chamber of neglect,
Wall'd about with disrespect,
From all these and this dull air,
A fit object for despair,
She hath taught me by her might
To draw comfort and delight.
Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,
I will cherish thee for this.
Poesie ; thou sweet'st content
That ere Heav'n to mortals lent :
Though they as a trifle leave thee,
Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee,
Though thou be to them a scorn,
That to nought but earth are born :
Let my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee.
Though our wise ones call thee madness,
Let me never taste of sadness,
If I love not thy maddest fits,
Above all their greatest wits.
And though some too seeming holy,
Do account thy raptures folly,
Thou dost teach me to contemn
What makes knaves and fools of them."

LECTURE V

ON THOMSON AND COWPER

THOMSON, the kind-hearted Thomson, was the most indolent of mortals and of poets. But he was also one of the best both of mortals and of poets. Dr. Johnson makes it his praise that he wrote "no line which

dying he would wish to blot." Perhaps a better proof of his honest simplicity, and inoffensive goodness of disposition, would be that he wrote no line which any other person living would wish that he should blot. Indeed, he himself wished, on his death-bed, formally to expunge his dedication of one of the Seasons to that finished courtier, and candid biographer of his own life, Bub Doddington. As critics, however, not as moralists, we might say on the other hand—"Would he had blotted a thousand!"—The same suavity of temper and sanguine warmth of feeling which threw such a natural grace and genial spirit of enthusiasm over his poetry, was also the cause of its inherent vices and defects. He is affected through carelessness: pompous from unsuspecting simplicity of character. He is frequently pedantic and ostentatious in his style, because he had no consciousness of these vices in himself. He mounts upon stilts, not out of vanity, but indolence. He seldom writes a good line, but he makes up for it by a bad one. He takes advantage of all the most trite and mechanical common-places of imagery and diction as a kindly relief to his Muse, and as if he thought them quite as good, and likely to be quite as acceptable to the reader, as his own poetry. He did not think the difference worth putting himself to the trouble of accomplishing. He had too little art to conceal his art: or did not even seem to know that there was any occasion for it. His art is as naked and undisguised as his nature; the one is as pure and genuine as the other is gross, gaudy, and meretricious.—All that is admirable in the Seasons, is the emanation of a fine natural genius, and sincere love of his subject, unforced, unstudied, that comes uncalled for, and departs unbidden. But he takes no pains, uses no self-correction; or if he seems to labour, it is worse than labour lost. His genius "cannot be constrained by mastery." The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind; and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader, by the mere force of spontaneous expression; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole business to chance;

or, willing to evade instead of encountering the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses, in which he represents the Spring, his own lovely, fresh, and innocent Spring, as descending to the earth.

> "Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come,
> And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,
> While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower
> Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend."

Who, from such a flimsy, round-about, unmeaning commencement as this, would expect the delightful, unexaggerated, home-felt descriptions of natural scenery, which are scattered in such unconscious profusion through this and the following cantos? For instance, the very next passage is crowded with a set of striking images.

> "And see where surly Winter passes off
> Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts:
> His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
> The shatter'd forest, and the ravag'd vale;
> While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch
> Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
> The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.
> As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,
> And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
> Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
> Deform the day delightless; so that scarce
> The bittern knows his time with bill ingulpht
> To shake the sounding marsh, or from the shore
> The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
> And sing their wild notes to the list'ning waste."

Thomson is the best of our descriptive poets: for he gives most of the poetry of natural description. Others have been quite equal to him, or have surpassed him, as Cowper for instance, in the picturesque part of his art, in marking the peculiar features and curious details of objects; —no one has yet come up to him in giving the sum total of their effects, their varying influences on the mind. He does not go into the *minutiæ* of a landscape, but describes the vivid impression which the whole makes upon his own

imagination; and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers. The colours with which he paints seem yet wet and breathing, like those of the living statue in the Winter's Tale. Nature in his descriptions is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself. We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold, the glow of summer, the gloom of winter, the tender promise of the spring, the full overshadowing foliage, the declining pomp and deepening tints of autumn. He transports us to the scorching heat of vertical suns, or plunges us into the chilling horrors and desolation of the frozen zone. We hear the snow drifting against the broken casement without, and see the fire blazing on the hearth within. The first scattered drops of a vernal shower patter on the leaves above our heads, or the coming storm resounds through the leafless groves. In a word, he describes not to the eye alone, but to the other senses, and to the whole man. He puts his heart into his subject, writes as he feels, and humanises whatever he touches. He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul. His faults were those of his style—of the author and the man; but the original genius of the poet, the pith and marrow of his imagination, the fine natural mould in which his feelings were bedded, were too much for him to counteract by neglect, or affectation, or false ornaments. It is for this reason that he is, perhaps, the most popular of all our poets, treating of a subject that all can understand, and in a way that is interesting to all alike, to the ignorant or the refined, because he gives back the impression which the things themselves make upon us in nature. "That," said a man of genius, seeing a little shabby soiled copy of Thomson's Seasons lying on the window-seat of an obscure country alehouse—"That is true fame!"

It has been supposed by some, that the Castle of Indolence is Thomson's best poem; but that is not the case. He has in it, indeed, poured out the whole soul of indolence, diffuse, relaxed, supine, dissolved into a voluptuous dream; and surrounded himself with a set of objects

and companions, in entire unison with the listlessness of his own temper. Nothing can well go beyond the descriptions of these inmates of the place, and their luxurious pampered way of life—of him who came among them like "a burnished fly in month of June," but soon left them on his heedless way; and him,

> "For whom the merry bells had rung, I ween,
> If in this nook of quiet, bells had ever been."

The in-door quiet and cushioned ease, where "all was one full-swelling bed;" the out-of-door stillness, broken only by "the stock-dove's plaint amid the forest deep,

> "That drowsy rustled to the sighing gale"—

are in the most perfect and delightful keeping. But still there are no passages in this exquisite little production of sportive ease and fancy, equal to the best of those in the Seasons. Warton, in his Essay on Pope, was the first to point out and do justice to some of these; for instance, to the description of the effects of the contagion among our ships at Carthagena—"of the frequent corse heard nightly plunged amid the sullen waves," and to the description of the pilgrims lost in the deserts of Arabia. This last passage, profound and striking as it is, is not free from those faults of style which I have already noticed.

> "————Breath'd hot
> From all the boundless furnace of the sky,
> And the wide-glitt'ring waste of burning sand,
> A suffocating wind the pilgrim smites
> With instant death. Patient of thirst and toil,
> Son of the desert, ev'n the camel feels
> Shot through his wither'd heart the fiery blast.
> Or from the black-red ether, bursting broad,
> Sallies the sudden whirlwind. Straight the sands,
> Commov'd around, in gath'ring eddies play;
> Nearer and nearer still they dark'ning come,
> Till with the gen'ral all-involving storm
> Swept up, the whole continuous wilds arise,
> And by their noon-day fount dejected thrown,
> Or sunk at night in sad disastrous sleep,
> Beneath descending hills the caravan
> Is buried deep. In Cairo's crowded streets,
> Th' impatient merchant, wond'ring, waits in vain;
> And Mecca saddens at the long delay."

There are other passages of equal beauty with these; such as that of the hunted stag, followed by "the inhuman rout,"

> "——That from the shady depth
> Expel him, circling through his ev'ry shift.
> He sweeps the forest oft, and sobbing sees
> The glades mild op'ning to the golden day,
> Where in kind contest with his butting friends
> He wont to struggle, or his loves enjoy."

The whole of the description of the frozen zone, in the Winter, is perhaps even finer and more thoroughly felt, as being done from early associations, than that of the torrid zone in his Summer. Any thing more beautiful than the following account of the Siberian exiles is, I think, hardly to be found in the whole range of poetry.

> "There through the prison of unbounded wilds,
> Barr'd by the hand of nature from escape,
> Wide roams the Russian exile. Nought around
> Strikes his sad eye but deserts lost in snow,
> And heavy-loaded groves, and solid floods,
> That stretch athwart the solitary vast
> Their icy horrors to the frozen main;
> And cheerless towns far distant, never bless'd,
> Save when its annual course the caravan
> Bends to the golden coast of rich Cathay,
> With news of human kind."

The feeling of loneliness, of distance, of lingering, slow-revolving years of pining expectation, of desolation within and without the heart, was never more finely expressed than it is here.

The account which follows of the employment of the Polar night—of the journeys of the natives by moonlight, drawn by rein-deer, and of the return of spring in Lapland—

> "Where pure Niemi's fairy mountains rise,
> And fring'd with roses Tenglio rolls his stream,"

is equally picturesque and striking in a different way. The traveller lost in the snow, is a well-known and admirable dramatic episode. I prefer, however, giving one example of our author's skill in painting common domestic scenery, as it will bear a more immediate com-

parison with the style of some later writers on such subjects. It is of little consequence what passage we take. The following description of the first setting in of winter is, perhaps, as pleasing as any.

"Through the hush'd air the whitening shower descends,
At first thin wav'ring, till at last the flakes
Fall broad and wide, and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow. The cherish'd fields
Put on their winter-robe of purest white:
'Tis brightness all, save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low the woods
Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid Sun,
Faint, from the West emits his ev'ning ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,
Is one wide dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man. Drooping, the lab'rer-ox
Stands cover'd o'er with snow, and then demands
The fruit of all his toil. The fowls of heav'n,
Tam'd by the cruel season, crowd around
The winnowing store, and claim the little boon
Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
The red-breast, sacred to the household Gods,
Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
Against the window beats; then, brisk, alights
On the warm hearth; then hopping o'er the floor,
Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is:
Till more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
Attract his slender feet. The foodless wilds
Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
By death in various forms, dark snares and dogs,
And more unpitying men, the garden seeks,
Urg'd on by fearless want. The bleating kind
Eye the bleak heav'n, and next, the glist'ning earth,
With looks of dumb despair; then, sad dispers'd,
Dig for the wither'd herb through heaps of snow."

It is thus that Thomson always gives a *moral sense* to nature.

Thomson's blank verse is not harsh, or utterly untuneable; but it is heavy and monotonous; it seems always labouring up-hill. The selections which have been made

from his works in Enfield's Speaker, and other books of extracts, do not convey the most favourable idea of his genius or taste; such as Palemon and Lavinia, Damon and Musidora, Celadon and Amelia. Those parts of any author which are most liable to be stitched in worsted, and framed and glazed, are not by any means always the best. The moral descriptions and reflections in the Seasons are in an admirable spirit, and written with great force and fervour.

His poem on Liberty is not equally good: his Muse was too easy and good-natured for the subject, which required as much indignation against unjust and arbitrary power, as complacency in the constitutional monarchy, under which, just after the expulsion of the Stuarts and the establishment of the House of Hanover, in contempt of the claims of hereditary pretenders to the throne, Thomson lived. Thomson was but an indifferent hater; and the most indispensable part of the love of liberty has unfortunately hitherto been the hatred of tyranny. Spleen is the soul of patriotism, and of public good: but you would not expect a man who has been seen eating peaches off a tree with both hands in his waistcoat pockets, to be "overrun with the spleen," or to heat himself needlessly about an abstract proposition.

His plays are liable to the same objection. They are never acted, and seldom read. The author could not, or would not, put himself out of his way, to enter into the situations and passions of others, particularly of a tragic kind. The subject of Tancred and Sigismunda, which is taken from a serious episode in Gil Blas, is an admirable one, but poorly handled: the ground may be considered as still unoccupied.

Cowper, whom I shall speak of in this connection, lived at a considerable distance of time after Thomson; and had some advantages over him, particularly in simplicity of style, in a certain precision and minuteness of graphical description, and in a more careful and leisurely choice of such topics only as his genius and peculiar habits of mind prompted him to treat of. The Task has fewer

blemishes than the Seasons; but it has not the same capital excellence, the "unbought grace" of poetry, the power of moving and infusing the warmth of the author's mind into that of the reader. If Cowper had a more polished taste, Thomson had, beyond comparison, a more fertile genius, more impulsive force, a more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject. If in Thomson you are sometimes offended with the slovenliness of the author by profession, determined to get through his task at all events; in Cowper you are no less dissatisfied with the finicalness of the private gentleman, who does not care whether he completes his work or not; and in whatever he does, is evidently more solicitous to please himself than the public. There is an effeminacy about him, which shrinks from and repels common and hearty sympathy. With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature: he looks at her over his clipped hedges, and from his well-swept garden-walks; or if he makes a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home. He shakes hands with nature with a pair of fashionable gloves on, and leads "his Vashti" forth to public view with a look of consciousness and attention to etiquette, as a fine gentleman hands a lady out to dance a minuet. He is delicate to fastidiousness, and glad to get back, after a romantic adventure with crazy Kate, a party of gypsies or a little child on a common, to the drawing-room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle—No, I beg his pardon, not to the singing, well-scoured tea-kettle, but to the polished and loud-hissing urn. His walks and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails, with as much an appearance of *petit-maitreship* as of humanity. He has some of the sickly sensibility and pampered refinements of Pope; but then Pope prided himself in them: whereas, Cowper affects to be all simplicity and plainness. He had neither Thomson's

love of the unadorned beauties of nature, nor Pope's exquisite sense of the elegances of art. He was, in fact, a nervous man, afraid of trusting himself to the seductions of the one, and ashamed of putting forward his pretensions to an intimacy with the other: but to be a coward, is not the way to succeed either in poetry, in war, or in love! Still he is a genuine poet, and deserves all his reputation. His worst vices are amiable weaknesses, elegant trifling. Though there is a frequent dryness, timidity, and jejuneness in his manner, he has left a number of pictures of domestic comfort and social refinement, as well as of natural imagery and feeling, which can hardly be forgotten but with the language itself. Such, among others, are his memorable description of the post coming in, that of the preparations for tea in a winter's evening in the country, of the unexpected fall of snow, of the frosty morning (with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice), and, most of all, the winter's walk at noon. Every one of these may be considered as distinct studies, or highly-finished cabinet-pieces, arranged without order or coherence. I shall be excused for giving the last of them, as what has always appeared to me one of the most feeling, elegant, and perfect specimens of this writer's manner.

> "The night was winter in his roughest mood;
> The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon
> Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
> And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
> The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
> And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue,
> Without a cloud, and white without a speck
> The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
> Again the harmony comes o'er the vale;
> And through the trees I view th' embattled tow'r,
> Whence all the music. I again perceive
> The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
> And settle in soft musings as I tread
> The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
> Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.
> The roof, though moveable through all its length,
> As the wind sways it, has yet well suffic'd,

And, intercepting in their silent fall
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
The redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd.
Pleas'd with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendent drop of ice,
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And Learning wiser grow without his books.
Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men ;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
By which the magic art of shrewder wits
Holds an unthinking multitude enthrall'd.
Some to the fascination of a name
Surrender judgment hood-wink'd. Some the style
Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds
Of error leads them, by a tune entranc'd.
While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear
The insupportable fatigue of thought,
And swallowing therefore without pause or choice
The total grist unsifted, husks and all.
But trees, and rivulets whose rapid course
Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer,
And sheep-walks populous with bleating lambs,
And lanes, in which the primrose ere her time
Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,
Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth,
Not shy, as in the world, and to be won
By slow solicitation, seize at once
The roving thought, and fix it on themselves."

His satire is also excellent. It is pointed and forcible, with the polished manners of the gentleman, and the honest indignation of the virtuous man. His religious poetry, except where it takes a tincture of controversial heat, wants elevation and fire. His Muse had not a seraph's wing. I might refer, in illustration of this opinion, to the laboured anticipation of the Millennium at the end of the sixth book. He could describe a piece

of shell-work as well as any modern poet : but he could not describe the New Jerusalem so well as John Bunyan ; —nor are his verses on Alexander Selkirk so good as Robinson Crusoe. The one is not so much like a vision, nor is the other so much like the reality.

The first volume of Cowper's poems has, however, been less read than it deserved. The comparison in these poems of the proud and humble believer to the peacock and the pheasant, and the parallel between Voltaire and the poor cottager, are exquisite pieces of eloquence and poetry, particularly the last.

> "Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
> Pillow and bobbins all her little store ;
> Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
> Shuffling her threads about the live-long day,
> Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night,
> Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light ;
> She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
> Has little understanding, and no wit,
> Receives no praise ; but, though her lot be such,
> (Toilsome and indigent) she renders much ;
> Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
> A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew ;
> And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
> Her title to a treasure in the skies.
> O happy peasant ! Oh unhappy bard !
> His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward ;
> He prais'd, perhaps, for ages yet to come,
> She never heard of half a mile from home :
> He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
> She safe in the simplicity of hers."

His character of Whitfield, in the poem on Hope, is one of his most spirited and striking things. It is written *con amore*.

> "But if, unblameable in word and thought,
> A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
> With all Elijah's dignity of tone,
> And all the love of the beloved John,
> To storm the citadels they build in air,
> To smite the untemper'd wall ('tis death to spare,)
> To sweep away all refuges of lies,
> And place, instead of quirks, themselves devise,
> Lama Sabachthani before their eyes ;
> To show that without Christ all gain is loss,

All hope despair that stands not on his cross ;
Except a few his God may have impressed,
A tenfold phrensy seizes all the rest."

These lines were quoted, soon after their appearance, by the Monthly Reviewers, to shew that Cowper was no poet, though they afterwards took credit to themselves for having been the first to introduce his verses to the notice of the public. It is not a little remarkable that these same critics regularly damned, at its first coming out, every work which has since acquired a standard reputation with the public.—Cowper's verses on his mother's picture, and his lines to Mary, are some of the most pathetic that ever were written. His stanzas on the loss of the Royal George have a masculine strength and feeling beyond what was usual with him. The story of John Gilpin has perhaps given as much pleasure to as many people as any thing of the same length that ever was written.

His life was an unhappy one. It was embittered by a morbid affection, and by his religious sentiments. Nor are we to wonder at this, or bring it as a charge against religion ; for it is the nature of the poetical temperament to carry every thing to excess, whether it be love, religion, pleasure, or pain, as we may see in the case of Cowper and of Burns, and to find torment or rapture in that in which others merely find a resource from *ennui*, or a relaxation from common occupation.

There are two poets still living who belong to the same class of excellence, and of whom I shall here say a few words ; I mean Crabbe, and Robert Bloomfield, the author of the Farmer's Boy. As a painter of simple natural scenery, and of the still life of the country, few writers have more undeniable and unassuming pretensions than the ingenious and self-taught poet, last-mentioned. Among the sketches of this sort I would mention, as equally distinguished for delicacy, faithfulness, and *naïveté*, his description of lambs racing, of the pigs going out an acorning, of the boy sent to feed his sheep before the break of day in winter ; and I might add the innocently told story of the poor bird-boy, who in vain through

the live-long day expects his promised companions at his hut, to share his feast of roasted sloes with him, as an example of that humble pathos, in which this author excels. The fault indeed of his genius is that it is too humble: his Muse has something not only rustic, but menial in her aspect. He seems afraid of elevating nature, lest she should be ashamed of him. Bloomfield very beautifully describes the lambs in spring-time as racing round the hillocks of green turf: Thomson, in describing the same image, makes the mound of earth the remains of an old Roman encampment. Bloomfield never gets beyond his own experience; and that is somewhat confined. He gives the simple appearance of nature, but he gives it naked, shivering, and unclothed with the drapery of a moral imagination. His poetry has much the effect of the first approach of spring, "while yet the year is unconfirmed," where a few tender buds venture forth here and there, but are chilled by the early frosts and nipping breath of poverty.—It should seem from this and other instances that have occurred within the last century, that we cannot expect from original genius alone, without education, in modern and more artificial periods, the same bold and independent results as in former periods. And one reason appears to be, that though such persons, from whom we might at first expect a restoration of the good old times of poetry, are not encumbered and enfeebled by the trammels of custom, and the dull weight of other men's ideas; yet they are oppressed by the consciousness of a want of the common advantages which others have; are looking at the tinsel finery of the age, while they neglect the rich unexplored mine in their own breasts; and instead of setting an example for the world to follow, spend their lives in aping, or in the despair of aping, the hackneyed accomplishments of their inferiors. Another cause may be, that original genius alone is not sufficient to produce the highest excellence, without a corresponding state of manners, passions, and religious belief: that no single mind can move in direct opposition to the vast machine of the world around it; that the poet can do no

more than stamp the mind of his age upon his works; and that all that the ambition of the highest genius can hope to arrive at, after the lapse of one or two generations, is the perfection of that more refined and effeminate style of studied elegance and adventitious ornament, which is the result, not of nature, but of art. In fact, no other style of poetry has succeeded, or seems likely to succeed, in the present day. The public taste hangs like a millstone round the neck of all original genius that does not conform to established and exclusive models. The writer is not only without popular sympathy, but without a rich and varied mass of materials for his mind to work upon and assimilate unconsciously to itself; his attempts at originality are looked upon as affectation, and in the end, degenerate into it from the natural spirit of contradiction, and the constant uneasy sense of disappointment and undeserved ridicule. But to return.

Crabbe is, if not the most natural, the most literal of our descriptive poets. He exhibits the smallest circumstances of the smallest things. He gives the very costume of meanness; the non-essentials of every trifling incident. He is his own landscape-painter, and engraver too. His pastoral scenes seem pricked on paper in little dotted lines. He describes the interior of a cottage like a person sent there to distrain for rent. He has an eye to the number of arms in an old worm-eaten chair, and takes care to inform himself and the reader whether a joint-stool stands upon three legs or upon four. If a settle by the fire-side stands awry, it gives him as much disturbance as a tottering world; and he records the rent in a ragged counterpane as an event in history. He is equally curious in his back-grounds and in his figures. You know the christian and surnames of every one of his heroes,—the dates of their achievements, whether on a Sunday or a Monday,—their place of birth and burial, the colour of their clothes, and of their hair, and whether they squinted or not. He takes an inventory of the human heart exactly in the same manner as of the furniture of a sick room: his sentiments have very much the air of fixtures;

he gives you the petrifaction of a sigh, and carves a tear, to the life, in stone. Almost all his characters are tired of their lives, and you heartily wish them dead. They remind one of anatomical preservations; or may be said to bear the same relation to actual life that a stuffed cat in a glass-case does to the real one purring on the hearth: the skin is the same, but the life and the sense of heat is gone. Crabbe's poetry is like a museum, or curiosity-shop: every thing has the same posthumous appearance, the same inanimateness and identity of character. If Bloomfield is too much of the Farmer's Boy, Crabbe is too much of the parish beadle, an overseer of the country poor. He has no delight beyond the walls of a workhouse, and his officious zeal would convert the world into a vast infirmary. He is a kind of Ordinary, not of Newgate, but of nature. His poetical morality is taken from Burn's Justice, or the Statutes against Vagrants. He sets his own imagination in the stocks, and his Muse, like Malvolio, "wears cruel garters." He collects all the petty vices of the human heart, and superintends, as in a panopticon, a select circle of rural malefactors. He makes out the poor to be as bad as the rich—a sort of vermin for the others to hunt down and trample upon, and this he thinks a good piece of work. With him there are but two moral categories, riches and poverty, authority and dependence. His parish apprentice, Richard Monday, and his wealthy baronet, Sir Richard Monday, of Monday-place, are the same individual—the extremes of the same character, and of his whole system. "The latter end of his Commonwealth does not forget the beginning." But his parish ethics are the very worst model for a state: any thing more degrading and helpless cannot well be imagined. He exhibits just the contrary view of human life to that which Gay has done in his Beggar's Opera. In a word, Crabbe is the only poet who has attempted and succeeded in the *still life* of tragedy: who gives the stagnation of hope and fear—the deformity of vice without the temptation—the pain of sympathy without the interest—and who seems to rely, for the delight he is to convey to his

reader, on the truth and accuracy with which he describes only what is disagreeable.

The best descriptive poetry is not, after all, to be found in our descriptive poets. There are set descriptions of the flowers, for instance, in Thomson, Cowper, and others; but none equal to those in Milton's Lycidas, and in the Winter's Tale.

We have few good pastorals in the language. Our manners are not Arcadian; our climate is not an eternal spring; our age is not the age of gold. We have no pastoral-writers equal to Theocritus, nor any landscapes like those of Claude Lorraine. The best parts of Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar are two fables, Mother Hubberd's Tale, and the Oak and the Briar; which last is as splendid a piece of oratory as any to be found in the records of the eloquence of the British senate! Browne, who came after Spenser, and Withers, have left some pleasing allegorical poems of this kind. Pope's are as full of senseless finery and trite affectation, as if a peer of the realm were to sit for his picture with a crook and cocked hat on, smiling with an insipid air of no-meaning, between nature and fashion. Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia is a lasting monument of perverted power; where an image of extreme beauty, as that of "the shepherd boy piping as though he should never be old," peeps out once in a hundred folio pages, amidst heaps of intricate sophistry and scholastic quaintness. It is not at all like Nicholas Poussin's picture, in which he represents some shepherds wandering out in a morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription—"I also was an Arcadian!" Perhaps the best pastoral in the language is that prose-poem, Walton's Complete Angler. That well-known work has a beauty and romantic interest equal to its simplicity, and arising out of it. In the description of a fishing-tackle, you perceive the piety and humanity of the author's mind. It is to be doubted whether Sannazarius's Piscatory Eclogues are equal to the scenes described by Walton on the banks of the river Lea. He gives the feeling of the open air: we walk with him along the dusty road-side, or repose on

the banks of the river under a shady tree ; and in watching for the finny prey, imbibe what he beautifully calls "the patience and simplicity of poor honest fishermen." We accompany them to their inn at night, and partake of their simple, but delicious fare ; while Maud, the pretty milk-maid, at her mother's desire, sings the classical ditties of the poet Marlow ; "Come live with me, and be my love." Good cheer is not neglected in this work, any more than in Homer, or any other history that sets a proper value on the good things of this life. The prints in the Complete Angler give an additional reality and interest to the scenes it describes. While Tottenham Cross shall stand, and longer, thy work, amiable and happy old man, shall last!—It is in the notes to it that we find that character of "a fair and happy milkmaid," by Sir Thomas Overbury, which may vie in beauty and feeling with Chaucer's character of Griselda.

"A fair and happy milk-maid is a country wench that is so far from making herself beautiful by art, that one look of her's is able to put all face-physic out of countenance. She knows a fair look is but a dumb orator to commend virtue, therefore minds it not. All her excellences stand in her so silently, as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge. The lining of her apparel (which is herself) is far better than outsides of tissue; for though she be not arrayed in the spoil of the silk-worm, she is decked in innocency, a far better wearing. She doth not, with lying long in bed, spoil both her complexion and conditions. Nature hath taught her, too immoderate sleep is rust to the soul: she rises therefore with chanticleer, her dame's cock, and at night makes the lamb her curfew. Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made haycock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter evenings fall early (sitting at her merry wheel) she sings a defiance to the giddy wheel of Fortune. She doth all things with so sweet a grace, it seems ignorance will not suffer her to do ill, being her mind is to do well. She bestows her year's wages at next fair; and in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and bee-hive are all her physic and chirurgery, and she lives the longer for't. She dares go alone, and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none: yet, to say the truth, she is never alone, for she is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers, but short ones; yet they have their efficacy, in that they are not palled with ensuing idle cogitations. Lastly, her dreams are so chaste, that she dare tell them ; only a Friday's dream is all her superstition ; that she conceals for fear of anger. Thus lives she ; and all her care is she may die in the spring-time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet."

The love of the country has been sung by poets, and echoed by philosophers; but the first have not attempted, and the last have been greatly puzzled to account for it. I do not know that any one has ever explained, satisfactorily, the true source of this feeling, or of that soothing emotion which the sight of the country, or a lively description of rural objects hardly ever fails to infuse into the mind. Some have ascribed this feeling to the natural beauty of the objects themselves; others to the freedom from care, the silence and tranquillity which scenes of retirement afford; others to the healthy and innocent employments of a country life; others to the simplicity of country manners, and others to a variety of different causes; but none to the right one. All these, indeed, have their effect; but there is another principal one which has not been touched upon, or only slightly glanced at. I will not, however, imitate Mr. Horne Tooke, who after enumerating seventeen different definitions of the verb, and laughing at them all as deficient and nugatory, at the end of two quarto volumes does not tell us what the verb really is, and has left posterity to pluck out "the heart of his mystery." I will say at once what it is that distinguishes this interest from others, and that is its *abstractedness*. The interest we feel in human nature is exclusive, and confined to the individual; the interest we feel in external nature is common, and transferable from one object to all others of the same class. Thus.

Rousseau in his Confessions relates, that when he took possession of his room at Annecy, he found that he could see "a little spot of green" from his window, which endeared his situation the more to him, because, he says, it was the first time he had had this object constantly before him since he left Boissy, the place where he was at school when a child.[1] Some such feeling as that here described will be found lurking at the bottom of all our attachments of this sort. Were it not for the recollections habitually

[1] Pope also declares that he had a particular regard for an old post which stood in the court-yard before the house where he was brought up.

associated with them, natural objects could not interest the mind in the manner they do. No doubt, the sky is beautiful, the clouds sail majestically along its bosom ; the sun is cheering ; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches ; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely ; there is music in the babbling of a brook ; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur ; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference. Or, as the Minstrel sweetly sings,

> "Oh, how canst thou renounce the boundless store
> Of charms which Nature to her votary yields !
> The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
> The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields ;
> All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
> And all that echoes to the song of even,
> All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
> And all the dread magnificence of heaven,
> Oh, how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven ! "

It is not, however, the beautiful and magnificent alone that we admire in Nature ; the most insignificant and rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions ; we become attached to the most common and familiar images, as to the face of a friend whom we have long known, and from whom we have received many benefits. It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention ; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends ; it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain ; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.

There is, generally speaking, the same foundation for our love of Nature as for all our habitual attachments, namely, association of ideas. But this is not all. That

which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects; the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class. Our having been attached to any particular person does not make us feel the same attachment to the next person we may chance to meet; but, if we have once associated strong feelings of delight with the objects of natural scenery, the tie becomes indissoluble, and we shall ever after feel the same attachment to other objects of the same sort. I remember when I was abroad, the trees, and grass, and wet leaves, rustling in the walks of the Tuilleries, seemed to be as much English, to be as much the same trees and grass, that I had always been used to, as the sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me. Whence comes this difference? It arises from our always imperceptibly connecting the idea of the individual with man, and only the idea of the class with natural objects. In the one case, the external appearance or physical structure is the least thing to be attended to; in the other, it is every thing. The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas, contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses. I can, therefore, make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual, extend beyond himself to others. A crowd of people presents a disjointed, confused, and unsatisfactory appearance to the eye, because there is nothing to connect the motley assemblage into one continuous or general impression, unless when there is some common object of interest to fix their attention, as in the case of a full pit at the playhouse. The same principle will also account for that feeling of littleness, vacuity, and perplexity, which a stranger feels on entering the streets of a populous city.

Every individual he meets is a blow to his personal identity. Every new face is a teazing, unanswered riddle. He feels the same wearisome sensation in walking from Oxford Street to Temple Bar, as a person would do who should be compelled to read through the first leaf of all the volumes in a library. But it is otherwise with respect to nature. A flock of sheep is not a contemptible, but a beautiful sight. The greatest number and variety of physical objects do not puzzle the will, or distract the attention, but are massed together under one uniform and harmonious feeling. The heart reposes in greater security on the immensity of Nature's works, "expatiates freely there," and finds elbow room and breathing space. We are always at home with Nature. There is neither hypocrisy, caprice, nor mental reservation in her favours. Our intercourse with her is not liable to accident or change, suspicion or disappointment: she smiles on us still the same. A rose is always sweet, a lily is always beautiful: we do not hate the one, nor envy the other. If we have once enjoyed the cool shade of a tree, and been lulled into a deep repose by the sound of a brook running at its foot, we are sure that wherever we can find a shady stream, we can enjoy the same pleasure again; so that when we imagine these objects, we can easily form a mystic personification of the friendly power that inhabits them, Dryad or Naiad, offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade. Hence the origin of the Grecian mythology. All objects of the same kind being the same, not only in their appearance, but in their practical uses, we habitually confound them together under the same general idea; and whatever fondness we may have conceived for one, is immediately placed to the common account. The most opposite kinds and remote trains of feeling gradually go to enrich the same sentiment; and in our love of nature, there is all the force of individual attachment, combined with the most airy abstraction. It is this circumstance which gives that refinement, expansion, and wild interest, to feelings of this sort, when strongly excited, which every one must have experienced who is a true lover of nature.

It is the same setting sun that we see and remember year after year, through summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. The moon that shines above our heads, or plays through the checquered shade, is the same moon that we used to read of in Mrs. Radcliffe's romances. We see no difference in the trees first covered with leaves in the spring. The dry reeds rustling on the side of a stream—the woods swept by the loud blast—the dark massy foliage of autumn—the grey trunks and naked branches of the trees in winter—the sequestered copse, and wide-extended heath—the glittering sunny showers, and December snows—are still the same, or accompanied with the same thoughts and feelings: there is no object, however trifling or rude, that does not in some mood or other find its way into the heart, as a link in the chain of our living being; and this it is that makes good that saying of the poet—

> "To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Thus nature is a kind of universal home, and every object it presents to us an old acquaintance with unaltered looks; for there is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works, one undivided spirit pervading them throughout, that to him who has well acquainted himself with them, they speak always the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one's native tongue heard in some far-off country.

> "My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began,
> So is it now I am a man,
> So shall it be when I grow old and die.
> The child's the father of the man,
> And I would have my years to be
> Linked each to each by natural piety."

The daisy that first strikes the child's eye in trying to leap over his own shadow, is the same flower that with timid upward glance implores the grown man not to tread upon it. Rousseau, in one of his botanical excursions, meeting with the periwinkle, fell upon his knees, crying

out—*Ah! voila de la pervenche!* It was because he had thirty years before brought home the same flower with him in one of his rambles with Madame de Warens, near Chambery. It struck him as the same identical little blue flower that he remembered so well; and thirty years of sorrow and bitter regret were effaced from his memory. That, or a thousand other flowers of the same name, were the same to him, to the heart, and to the eye; but there was but one Madame Warens in the world, whose image was never absent from his thoughts; with whom flowers and verdure sprung up beneath his feet, and without whom all was cold and barren in nature and in his own breast. The cuckoo, "that wandering voice," that comes and goes with the spring, mocks our ears with one note from youth to age; and the lapwing, screaming round the traveller's path, repeats for ever the same sad story of Tereus and Philomel!

LECTURE VI.

ON SWIFT, YOUNG, GRAY, COLLINS, &c.

I SHALL in the present Lecture go back to the age of Queen Anne, and endeavour to give a cursory account of the most eminent of our poets, of whom I have not already spoken, from that period to the present.

The three principal poets among the wits of Queen Anne's reign, next to Pope, were Prior, Swift, and Gay. Parnell, though a good-natured, easy man, and a friend to poets and the Muses, was himself little more than an occasional versifier; and Arbuthnot, who had as much wit as the best of them, chose to shew it in prose, and not in verse. He had a very notable share in the immortal History of John Bull, and the inimitable and praiseworthy Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. There has been a great deal said and written about the plagiarisms of Sterne; but

the only real plagiarism he has been guilty of (if such theft were a crime), is in taking Tristram Shandy's father from Martin's, the elder Scriblerus. The original idea of the character, that is, of the opinionated, captious old gentleman, who is pedantic, not from profession, but choice, belongs to Arbuthnot.—Arbuthnot's style is distinguished from that of his contemporaries, even by a greater degree of terseness and conciseness. He leaves out every superfluous word; is sparing of connecting particles, and introductory phrases; uses always the simplest forms of construction; and is more a master of the idiomatic peculiarities and internal resources of the language than almost any other writer. There is a research in the choice of a plain, as well as of an ornamented or learned style; and, in fact, a great deal more. Among common English words, there may be ten expressing the same thing with different degrees of force and propriety, and only one of them the very word we want, because it is the only one that answers exactly with the idea we have in our minds. Each word in familiar use has a different set of associations and shades of meaning attached to it, and distinguished from each other by inveterate custom; and it is in having the whole of these at our command, and in knowing which to choose, as they are called for by the occasion, that the perfection of a pure conversational prose-style consists. But in writing a florid and artificial style, neither the same range of invention, nor the same quick sense of propriety—nothing but learning is required. If you know the words, and their general meaning, it is sufficient; it is impossible you should know the nicer inflections of signification, depending on an endless variety of application, in expressions borrowed from a foreign or dead language. They all impose upon the ear alike, because they are not familiar to it; the only distinction left is between the pompous and the plain; the *sesquipedalia verba* have this advantage, that they are all of one length; and any words are equally fit for a learned style, so that we have never heard them before. Themistocles thought that the same

sounding epithets could not suit all subjects, as the same dress does not fit all persons. The style of our modern prose-writers is very fine in itself; but it wants variety of inflection and adaptation; it hinders us from seeing the differences of the things it undertakes to describe.

What I have here insisted on will be found to be the leading distinction between the style of Swift, Arbuthnot, Steele, and the other writers of the age of Queen Anne, and the style of Dr. Johnson, which succeeded to it. The one is English, and the other is not. The writers first mentioned, in order to express their thoughts, looked about them for the properest word to convey any idea, that the language which they spoke, and which their countrymen understood, afforded: Dr. Johnson takes the first English word that offers, and by translating it at a venture into the first Greek or Latin word he can think of, only retaining the English termination, produces an extraordinary effect upon the reader, by much the same sort of mechanical process that Trim converted the old jack-boots into a pair of new mortars.

Dr. Johnson was a lazy learned man, who liked to think and talk, better than to read or write; who, however, wrote much and well, but too often by rote. His long compound Latin phrases required less thought, and took up more room than others. What shows the facilities afforded by this style of imposing generalization, is, that it was instantly adopted with success by all those who were writers by profession, or who were not; and that at present, we cannot see a lottery puff or a quack advertisement pasted against a wall, that is not perfectly Johnsonian in style. Formerly, the learned had the privilege of translating their notions into Latin; and a great privilege it was, as it confined the reputation and emoluments of learning to themselves. Dr. Johnson may be said to have naturalised this privilege, by inventing a sort of jargon translated half-way out of one language into the other, which raised the Doctor's reputation, and confounded all ranks in literature.

In the short period above alluded to, authors professed

to write as other men spoke; every body now affects to speak as authors write; and any one who retains the use of his mother tongue, either in writing or conversation, is looked upon as a very illiterate character.

Prior and Gay belong, in the characteristic excellences of their style, to the same class of writers with Suckling, Rochester, and Sedley: the former imbibed most of the licentious levity of the age of Charles II. and carried it on beyond the Revolution under King William. Prior has left no single work equal to Gay's Fables, or the Beggar's Opera. But in his lyrical and fugitive pieces he has shown even more genius, more playfulness, more mischievous gaiety. No one has exceeded him in the laughing grace with which he glances at a subject that will not bear examining, with which he gently hints at what cannot be directly insisted on, with which he half conceals, and half draws aside the veil from some of the Muses' nicest mysteries. His Muse is, in fact, a giddy wanton flirt, who spends her time in playing at snap-dragon and blind-man's buff, who tells what she should not, and knows more than she tells. She laughs at the tricks she shews us, and blushes, or would be thought to do so, at what she keeps concealed. Prior has translated several of Fontaine's Tales from the French; and they have lost nothing in the translation, either of their wit or malice. I need not name them: but the one I like the most, is that of Cupid in search of Venus's doves. No one could insinuate a knavish plot, a tender point, a loose moral, with such unconscious archness, and careless raillery as if he gained new self-possession and adroitness from the perplexity and confusion into which he throws scrupulous imaginations, and knew how to seize on all the ticklish parts of his subject, from their involuntary shrinking under his grasp. Some of his imitations of Boileau's servile addresses to Louis XIV. which he has applied with a happy mixture of wit and patriotic enthusiasm to King William, or as he familiarly calls him, to

> "Little Will, the scourge of France,
> No Godhead, but the first of men,"

are excellent, and shew the same talent for *double-entendre* and the same gallantry of spirit, whether in the softer lyric, or the more lively heroic. Some of Prior's *bon mots* are the best that are recorded.—His serious poetry, as his *Solomon*, is as heavy as his familiar style was light and agreeable. His moral Muse is a Magdalen, and should not have obtruded herself on public view. Henry and Emma is a paraphrase of the old ballad of the Nut-brown Maid, and not so good as the original. In short, as we often see in other cases, where men thwart their own genius, Prior's sentimental and romantic productions are mere affectation, the result not of powerful impulse or real feeling, but of a consciousness of his deficiencies, and a wish to supply their place by labour and art.

Gay was sometimes grosser than Prior, not systematically, but inadvertently—from not being so well aware of what he was about; nor was there the same necessity for caution, for his grossness is by no means so seductive or inviting.

Gay's Fables are certainly a work of great merit, both as to the quantity of invention implied, and as to the elegance and facility of the execution. They are, however, spun out too long; the descriptions and narrative are too diffuse and desultory; and the moral is sometimes without point. They are more like Tales than Fables. The best are, perhaps, the Hare with Many Friends, the Monkeys, and the Fox at the Point of Death. His Pastorals are pleasing and poetical. But his capital work is his Beggar's Opera. It is indeed a masterpiece of wit and genius, not to say of morality. In composing it, he chose a very unpromising ground to work upon, and he has prided himself in adorning it with all the graces, the precision, and brilliancy of style. It is a vulgar error to call this a vulgar play. So far from it, that I do not scruple to say that it appears to me one of the most refined productions in the language. The elegance of the composition is in exact proportion to the coarseness of the materials: by "happy alchemy of mind," the author has extracted an essence of refinement from

the dregs of human life, and turns its very dross into gold. The scenes, characters, and incidents are, in themselves, of the lowest and most disgusting kind: but, by the sentiments and reflections which are put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their mistresses, wives, or daughters, he has converted this motley group into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers. He has also effected this transformation without once violating probability, or "o'erstepping the modesty of nature." In fact, Gay has turned the tables on the critics; and by the assumed licence of the mock-heroic style, has enabled himself to *do justice to nature*, that is, to give all the force, truth, and locality of real feeling to the thoughts and expressions, without being called to the bar of false taste and affected delicacy. The extreme beauty and feeling of the song, "Woman is like the fair flower in its lustre," are only equalled by its characteristic propriety and *naïveté*. *Polly* describes her lover going to the gallows, with the same touching simplicity, and with all the natural fondness of a young girl in her circumstances, who sees in his approaching catastrophe nothing but the misfortunes and the personal accomplishments of the object of her affections. "I see him sweeter than the nosegay in his hand; the admiring crowd lament that so lovely a youth should come to an untimely end:—even butchers weep, and Jack Ketch refuses his fee rather than consent to tie the fatal knot." The preservation of the character and costume is complete. It has been said by a great authority—"There is some soul of goodness in things evil:"—and the *Beggar's Opera* is a good-natured but instructive comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine of the imagination, all the intoxication of pleasure, and the vanity of despair, round the short-lived existence of his heroes; while *Peachum* and *Lockitt* are seen in the back-ground, parcelling out their months and weeks between them. The general view exhibited of human life is of the most subtle and abstracted kind. The author has, with great felicity,

brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from the lowest conditions; and with the same penetrating glance, has detected the disguises which rank and circumstances lend to exalted vice. Every line in this sterling comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest sarcasm. The very wit, however, takes off from the offensiveness of the satire; and I have seen great statesmen, very great statesmen, heartily enjoying the joke, laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind. Indeed, it may be said that the moral of the piece is *to shew the vulgarity of vice*; or that the same violations of integrity and decorum, the same habitual sophistry in palliating their want of principle, are common to the great and powerful, with the meanest and most contemptible of the species. What can be more convincing than the arguments used by these would-be politicians, to shew that in hypocrisy, selfishness, and treachery, they do not come up to many of their betters? The exclamation of *Mrs. Peachum*, when her daughter marries *Macheath*, "Hussy, hussy, you will be as ill used, and as much neglected, as if you had married a lord," is worth all Miss Hannah More's laboured invectives on the laxity of the manners of high life!

I shall conclude this account of Gay with his verses on Sir Richard Blackmore, which may serve at once as a specimen of his own manner, and as a character of a voluminous contemporary poet, who was admired by Mr. Locke, and knighted by King William III.

> "See who ne'er was nor will be half-read,
> Who first sung Arthur, then sung Alfred;
> Praised great Eliza in God's anger,
> Till all true Englishmen cried, "Hang her!"—
> Maul'd human wit in one thick satire;
> Next in three books spoil'd human nature:
> Undid Creation at a jerk,
> And of Redemption made damn'd work.

Then took his Muse at once, and dipt her
Full in the middle of the Scripture.
What wonders there the man, grown old, did ?
Sternhold himself he out Sternholded.
Made David seem so mad and freakish,
All thought him just what thought King Achish.
No mortal read his Solomon
But judg'd Re'boam his own son.
Moses he served as Moses Pharaoh,
And Deborah as she Siserah ;
Made Jeremy full sore to cry,
And Job himself curse God and die.
What punishment all this must follow ?
Shall Arthur use him like King Tollo ?
Shall David as Uriah slay him ?
Or dextrous Deborah Siserah him ?
No !—none of these ! Heaven spare his life !
But send him, honest Job, thy wife."

Gay's Trivia, or Art of Walking the Streets, is as pleasant as walking the streets must have been at the time when it was written. His ballad of Black Eyed Susan is one of the most delightful that can be imagined ; nor do I see that it is a bit the worse for Mr. Jekyll's parody on it.

Swift's reputation as a poet has been in a manner obscured by the greater splendour, by the natural force and inventive genius of his prose writings ; but if he had never written either the Tale of a Tub or Gulliver's Travels, his name merely as a poet would have come down to us, and have gone down to posterity with well-earned honours. His Imitations of Horace, and still more his Verses on his own Death, place him in the first rank of agreeable moralists in verse. There is not only a dry humour, an exquisite tone of irony in these productions of his pen ; but there is a touching, unpretending pathos, mixed up with the most whimsical and eccentric strokes of pleasantry and satire. His Description of the Morning in London, and of a City Shower, which were first published in the Tatler, are among the most delightful of the contents of that very delightful work. Swift shone as one of the most sensible of the poets ; he is also distinguished as one of the most nonsensical of them. No man has written so many lack-a-daisical, slip-shod, tedious,

trifling, foolish, fantastical verses as he, which are so little an imputation on the wisdom of the writer; and which, in fact, only shew his readiness to oblige others, and to forget himself. He has gone so far as to invent a new stanza of fourteen and sixteen syllable lines for Mary the cookmaid to vent her budget of nothings, and for Mrs. Harris to gossip with the deaf old housekeeper. Oh, when shall we have such another Rector of Laracor!— The Tale of a Tub is one of the most masterly compositions in the language, whether for thought, wit, or style. It is so capital and undeniable a proof of the author's talents, that Dr. Johnson, who did not like Swift, would not allow that he wrote it. It is hard that the same performance should stand in the way of a man's promotion to a bishopric, as wanting gravity, and at the same time be denied to be his, as having too much wit. It is a pity the Doctor did not find out some graver author, for whom he felt a critical kindness, on whom to father this splendid but unacknowledged production. Dr. Johnson could not deny that Gulliver's Travels were his; he therefore disputed their merits, and said that after the first idea of them was conceived, they were easy to execute; all the rest followed mechanically. I do not know how that may be; but the mechanism employed is something very different from any that the author of Rasselas was in the habit of bringing to bear on such occasions. There is nothing more futile, as well as invidious, than this mode of criticising a work of original genius. Its greatest merit is supposed to be in the invention; and you say, very wisely, that it is not *in the execution*. You might as well take away the merit of the invention of the telescope, by saying that, after its uses were explained and understood, any ordinary eyesight could look through it. Whether the excellence of Gulliver's Travels is in the conception or the execution, is of little consequence; the power is somewhere, and it is a power that has moved the world. The power is not that of big words and vaunting common places. Swift left these to those who wanted them; and

has done what his acuteness and intensity of mind alone could enable any one to conceive or to perform. His object was to strip empty pride and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them ; and for this purpose he has cheated the imagination of the illusions which the prejudices of sense and of the world put upon it, by reducing everything to the abstract predicament of size. He enlarges or diminishes the scale, as he wishes to shew the insignificance or the grossness of our overweening self-love. That he has done this with mathematical precision, with complete presence of mind and perfect keeping, in a manner that comes equally home to the understanding of the man and of the child, does not take away from the merit of the work or the genius of the author. He has taken a new view of human nature, such as a being of a higher sphere might take of it ; he has torn the scales from off his moral vision ; he has tried an experiment upon human life, and sifted its pretensions from the alloy of circumstances ; he has measured it with a rule, has weighed it in a balance, and found it, for the most part, wanting and worthless—in substance and in shew. Nothing solid, nothing valuable is left in his system but virtue and wisdom. What a libel is this upon mankind ! What a convincing proof of misanthropy ! What presumption and what *malice prepense*, to shew men what they are, and to teach them what they ought to be ! What a mortifying stroke aimed at national glory, is that unlucky incident of Gulliver's wading across the channel and carrying off the whole fleet of Blefuscu ! After that, we have only to consider which of the contending parties was in the right. What a shock to personal vanity is given in the account of Gulliver's nurse Glumdalclitch ! Still, notwithstanding the disparagement to her personal charms, her good-nature remains the same amiable quality as before. I cannot see the harm, the misanthropy, the immoral and degrading tendency of this. The moral lesson is as fine as the intellectual exhibition is amusing. It is an attempt to tear off the mask of imposture from the world ; and

nothing but imposture has a right to complain of it. It is, indeed, the way with our quacks in morality to preach up the dignity of human nature, to pamper pride and hypocrisy with the idle mockeries of the virtues they pretend to, and which they have not: but it was not Swift's way to cant morality or any thing else; nor did his genius prompt him to write unmeaning panegyrics on mankind!

I do not, therefore, agree with the estimate of Swift's moral or intellectual character, given by an eminent critic, who does not seem to have forgotten the party politics of Swift. I do not carry my political resentments so far back: I can at this time of day forgive Swift for having been a Tory. I feel little disturbance (whatever I might think of them) at his political sentiments, which died with him, considering how much else he has left behind him of a more solid and imperishable nature! If he had, indeed, (like some others) merely left behind him the lasting infamy of a destroyer of his country, or the shining example of an apostate from liberty, I might have thought the case altered.

The determination with which Swift persisted in a preconcerted theory, savoured of the morbid affection of which he died. There is nothing more likely to drive a man mad, than the being unable to get rid of the idea of the distinction between right and wrong, and an obstinate, constitutional preference of the true to the agreeable. Swift was not a Frenchman. In this respect he differed from Rabelais and Voltaire. They have been accounted the three greatest wits in modern times; but their wit was of a peculiar kind in each. They are little beholden to each other; there is some resemblance between Lord Peter in the Tale of a Tub, and Rabelais' Friar John; but in general they are all three authors of a substantive character in themselves. Swift's wit (particularly in his chief prose works) was serious, saturnine, and practical; Rabelais' was fantastical and joyous; Voltaire's was light, sportive and verbal. Swift's wit was the wit of sense; Rabelais', the wit of nonsense; Voltaire's, of indifference to both. The

ludicrous in Swift arises out of his keen sense of impropriety, his soreness and impatience of the least absurdity. He separates, with a severe and caustic air, truth from falsehood, folly from wisdom, "shews vice her own image, scorn her own feature;" and it is the force, the precision, and the honest abruptness with which the separation is made, that excites our surprise, our admiration, and laughter. He sets a mark of reprobation on that which offends good sense and good manners, which cannot be mistaken, and which holds it up to our ridicule and contempt ever after. His occasional disposition to trifling (already noticed) was a relaxation from the excessive earnestness of his mind. *Indignatio facit versus.* His better genius was his spleen. It was the biting acrimony of his temper that sharpened his other faculties. The truth of his perceptions produced the pointed coruscations of his wit; his playful irony was the result of inward bitterness of thought; his imagination was the product of the literal, dry, incorrigible tenaciousness of his understanding. He endeavoured to escape from the persecution of realities into the regions of fancy, and invented his Lilliputians and Brobdingnagians, Yahoos, and Houynhyms, as a diversion to the more painful knowledge of the world around him: *they* only made him laugh, while men and women made him angry. His feverish impatience made him view the infirmities of that great baby the world, with the same scrutinizing glance and jealous irritability that a parent regards the failings of its offspring; but, as Rousseau has well observed, parents have not on this account been supposed to have more affection for other people's children than their own. In other respects, and except from the sparkling effervescence of his gall, Swift's brain was as "dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." He hated absurdity—Rabelais loved it, exaggerated it with supreme satisfaction, luxuriated in its endless varieties, rioted in nonsense, "reigned there and revelled." He dwelt on the absurd and ludicrous for the pleasure they gave him, not for the pain. He lived upon laughter, and died laughing. He indulged

his vein, and took his full swing of folly. He did not baulk his fancy or his readers. His wit was to him "as riches fineless;" he saw no end of his wealth in that way, and set no limits to his extravagance: he was communicative, prodigal, boundless, and inexhaustible. His were the Saturnalia of wit, the riches and the royalty, the health and long life. He is intoxicated with gaiety, mad with folly. His animal spirits drown him in a flood of mirth: his blood courses up and down his veins like wine. His thirst of enjoyment is as great as his thirst of drink: his appetite for good things of all sorts is unsatisfied, and there is a never-ending supply. *Discourse is dry*; so they moisten their words in their cups, and relish their dry jests with plenty of Botargos and dried neats' tongues. It is like Camacho's wedding in Don Quixote, where Sancho ladled out whole pullets and fat geese from the soup-kettles at a pull. The flagons are setting a running, their tongues wag at the same time, and their mirth flows as a river. How Friar John roars and lays about him in the vineyard! How Panurge whines in the storm, and how dexterously he contrives to throw the sheep overboard! How much Pantagruel behaves like a wise king! How Gargantua mewls, and pules, and slabbers his nurse, and demeans himself most like a royal infant! what provinces he devours! what seas he drinks up! How he eats, drinks, and sleeps—sleeps, eats, and drinks! The style of Rabelais is no less prodigious than his matter. His words are of marrow, unctuous, dropping fatness. He was a mad wag, the king of good fellows, and prince of practical philosophers!

Rabelais was a Frenchman of the old school—Voltaire of the new. The wit of the one arose from an exuberance of enjoyment—of the other, from an excess of indifference, real or assumed. Voltaire had no enthusiasm for one thing or another: he made light of every thing. In his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver money in the Arabian Nights were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry crumbling leaves! He is a Parisian. He never exaggerates, is

never violent : he treats things with the most provoking *sang froid* ; and expresses his contempt by the most indirect hints, and in the fewest words, as if he hardly thought them worth even his contempt. He retains complete possession of himself and of his subject. He does not effect his purpose by the eagerness of his blows, but by the delicacy of his tact. The poisoned wound he inflicted was so fine, as scarcely to be felt till it rankled and festered in its "mortal consequences." His callousness was an excellent foil for the antagonists he had mostly to deal with. He took knaves and fools on his shield well. He stole away its cloak from grave imposture. If he reduced other things below their true value, making them seem worthless and hollow, he did not degrade the pretensions of tyranny and superstition below their true value, by making them seem utterly worthless and hollow, as contemptible as they were odious. This was the service he rendered to truth and mankind! His *Candide* is a masterpiece of wit. It has been called "the dull product of a scoffer's pen." It is, indeed, "the product of a scoffer's pen ;" but after reading the Excursion, few people will think it *dull*. It is in the most perfect keeping, and without any appearance of effort. Every sentence tells, and the whole reads like one sentence. There is something sublime in Martin's sceptical indifference to moral good and evil. It is the repose of the grave. It is better to suffer this living death, than a living martyrdom. "Nothing can touch him further." The moral of Candide (such as it is) is the same as that of Rasselas : the execution is different. Voltaire says, "A great book is a great evil." Dr. Johnson would have laboured this short apophthegm into a voluminous commonplace. Voltaire's traveller (in another work) being asked "whether he likes black or white mutton best," replies that "he is indifferent, provided it is tender." Dr. Johnson did not get at a conclusion by so short a way as this. If Voltaire's licentiousness is objected to me, I say, let it be placed to its true account, the manners of the age and court in which he lived. The lords and ladies of

the bedchamber in the reign of Louis XV. found no fault with the immoral tendency of his writings. Why then should our modern *purists* quarrel with them?—But to return.

Young is a gloomy epigrammatist. He has abused great powers both of thought and language. His moral reflections are sometimes excellent; but he spoils their beauty by overloading them with a religious horror, and at the same time giving them all the smart turns and quaint expression of an enigma or repartee in verse. The well-known lines on Procrastination are in his best manner:

> "Be wise to-day; 'tis madness to defer;
> Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
> Thus on, till wisdom is push'd out of life.
> Procrastination is the thief of time;
> Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
> And to the mercies of a moment leaves
> The vast concerns of an eternal scene.

> Of man's miraculous mistakes, this bears
> The palm, "That all men are about to live,"
> For ever on the brink of being born.
> All pay themselves the compliment to think
> They, one day, shall not drivel; and their pride
> On this reversion takes up ready praise;
> At least, their own; their future selves applauds;
> How excellent that life they ne'er will lead!
> Time lodg'd in their own hands is Folly's vails:
> That lodg'd in Fate's, to Wisdom they consign;
> The thing they can't but purpose, they postpone.
> 'Tis not in Folly, not to scorn a fool;
> And scarce in human Wisdom to do more.
> All Promise is poor dilatory man,
> And that through every stage. When young, indeed,
> In full content we, sometimes, nobly rest,
> Un-anxious for ourselves; and only wish,
> As duteous sons, our fathers were more wise.
> At thirty man suspects himself a fool;
> Knows it at forty, and reforms his plan;
> At fifty chides his infamous delay,
> Pushes his prudent purpose to Resolve;
> In all the magnanimity of thought
> Resolves, and re-resolves; then dies the same.

> And why ? Because he thinks himself immortal.
> All men think all men mortal, but themselves;
> Themselves, when some alarming shock of fate
> Strikes through their wounded hearts the sudden dread ;
> But their hearts wounded, like the wounded air,
> Soon close ; where past the shaft, no trace is found.
> As from the wing no scar the sky retains ;
> The parted wave no furrow from the keel ;
> So dies in human hearts the thought of death.
> Ev'n with the tender tear which nature sheds
> O'er those we love, we drop it in their grave."

His Universal Passion is a keen and powerful satire ; but the effort takes from the effect, and oppresses attention by perpetual and violent demands upon it. His tragedy of the Revenge is monkish and scholastic. Zanga is a vulgar caricature of Iago. The finest lines in it are the burst of triumph at the end, when his revenge is completed :

> "Let Europe and her pallid sons go weep,
> Let Afric on her hundred thrones rejoice," &c.

Collins is a writer of a very different stamp, who had perhaps less general power of mind than Young ; but he had that true *vivida vis*, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts of poetry. He leaves stings in the minds of his readers, certain traces of thought and feelings which never wear out, because nature had left them in his own mind. He is the only one of the minor poets of whom, if he had lived, it cannot be said that he might not have done the greatest things. The germ is there. He is sometimes affected, unmeaning, and obscure ; but he also catches rich glimpses of the bowers of Paradise, and has lofty aspirations after the highest seats of the Muses. With a great deal of tinsel and splendid patch-work, he has not been able to hide the solid sterling ore of genius. In his best works there is an attic simplicity, a pathos, and fervour of imagination, which make us the more lament that the efforts of his mind were at first depressed by neglect and pecuniary embarrassment, and at length buried in the gloom of an unconquerable and fatal malady. How many poets have

gone through all the horrors of poverty and contempt, and ended their days in moping melancholy or moody madness!

> "We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness."

Is this the fault of themselves, of nature in tempering them of too fine a clay, or of the world, that spurner of living, and patron of dead merit? Read the account of Collins—with hopes frustrated, with faculties blighted, at last, when it was too late for himself or others, receiving the deceitful favours of relenting Fortune, which served only to throw their sunshine on his decay, and to light him to an early grave. He was found sitting with every spark of imagination extinguished, and with only the faint traces of memory and reason left—with only one book in his room, the Bible; "but that," he said, "was the best." A melancholy damp hung like an unwholesome mildew upon his faculties—a canker had consumed the flower of his life. He produced works of genius, and the public regarded them with scorn: he aimed at excellence that should be his own, and his friends treated his efforts as the wanderings of fatuity. The proofs of his capacity are, his Ode on Evening, his Ode on the Passions (particularly the fine personification of Hope), his Ode to Fear, the Dirge in Cymbeline, the Lines on Thomson's Grave, and his Eclogues, parts of which are admirable. But perhaps his Ode on the Poetical Character is the best of all. A rich distilled perfume emanates from it like the breath of genius; a golden cloud envelopes it; a honeyed paste of poetic diction encrusts it, like the candied coat of the auricula. His Ode to Evening shews equal genius in the images and versification. The sound steals slowly over the ear, like the gradual coming on of evening itself:

> "If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
> May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
> Like thy own solemn springs,
> Thy springs and dying gales,

O nymph reserv'd, while now the bright-haired sun
Sits on yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed :

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd bat,
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum.
Now teach me, maid compos'd,
To breathe some soften'd strain,

Whose numbers stealing through thy darkling vale
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As musing slow, I hail
Thy genial, lov'd return !

For when thy folding star arising shews
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
The fragrant Hours and Elves
Who slept in flow'rs the day,

And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge,
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and lovelier still,
The pensive Pleasures sweet
Prepare thy shadowy car ;

Then lead, calm Votress, where some sheety lake
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,
Or upland fallows grey
Reflect its last cool gleam.

But when chill blust'ring winds, or driving rain,
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut,
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim discover'd spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve !
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy lingering light ;

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves ;
Or Winter yelling through the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train,
And rudely rends thy robes ;

So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipp'd Health,
Thy gentlest influence own,
And hymn thy favourite name."

Hammond, whose poems are bound up with Collins's, in Bell's pocket edition, was a young gentleman, who appears to have fallen in love about the year 1740, and who translated Tibullus into English verse, to let his mistress and the public know of it.

I should conceive that Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray: he had more of that fine madness which is inseparable from it, of its turbid effervescence, of all that pushes it to the verge of agony or rapture. Gray's Pindaric Odes are, I believe, generally given up at present: they are stately and pedantic, a kind of methodical borrowed phrenzy. But I cannot so easily give up, nor will the world be in any haste to part with his Elegy in a Country Church-yard: it is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life. Mr. Coleridge (in his Literary Life) says, that his friend Mr. Wordsworth had undertaken to shew that the language of the Elegy is unintelligible: it has, however, been understood! The Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College is more mechanical and commonplace; but it touches on certain strings about the heart, that vibrate in unison with it to our latest breath. No one ever passes by Windsor's "stately heights," or sees the distant spires of Eton College below, without thinking of Gray. He deserves that we should think of him; for he thought of others, and turned a trembling, ever-watchful ear to "the still sad music of humanity."—His Letters are inimitably fine. If his poems are sometimes finical and pedantic, his prose is quite free from affectation. He pours his thoughts out upon paper as they arise in his mind; and they arise in his mind without pretence, or constraint, from the pure impulse of learned leisure and contemplative indolence. He is not here on stilts or in buckram; but smiles in his easy chair, as he moralises through the loop-

holes of retreat, on the bustle and raree-show of the world, or on "those reverend bedlams, colleges and schools!" He had nothing to do but to read and to think, and to tell his friends what he read and thought. His life was a luxurious, thoughtful dream. "Be mine," he says in one of his Letters, "to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon." And in another, to shew his contempt for action and the turmoils of ambition, he says to some one, "Don't you remember Lords —— and ——, who are now great statesmen, little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part, I do not feel a bit wiser, or bigger, or older than I did then." What an equivalent for not being wise or great, to be always young! What a happiness never to lose or gain anything in the game of human life, by being never any thing more than a looker-on!

How different from Shenstone, who only wanted to be looked at: who withdrew from the world to be followed by the crowd, and courted popularity by affecting privacy! His Letters shew him to have lived in a continual fever of petty vanity, and to have been a finished literary coquet. He seems always to say, "You will find nothing in the world so amiable as Nature and me: come, and admire us." His poems are indifferent and tasteless, except his Pastoral Ballad, his Lines on Jemmy Dawson, and his School-mistress, which last is a perfect piece of writing.

Akenside had in him the materials of poetry, but he was hardly a great poet. He improved his Pleasures of the Imagination in the subsequent editions, by pruning away a great many redundances of style and ornament. Armstrong is better, though he has not chosen a very exhilarating subject—The Art of Preserving Health. Churchill's Satires on the Scotch, and Characters of the Players, are as good as the subjects deserved—they are strong, coarse, and full of an air of hardened assurance. I ought not to pass over without mention Green's Poem on the Spleen, or Dyer's Grongar Hill.

The principal name of the period we are now come to is that of Goldsmith, than which few names stand higher

or fairer in the annals of modern literature. One should have his own pen to describe him as he ought to be described—amiable, various, and bland, with careless inimitable grace touching on every kind of excellence—with manners unstudied, but a gentle heart—performing miracles of skill from pure happiness of nature, and whose greatest fault was ignorance of his own worth. As a poet, he is the most flowing and elegant of our versifiers since Pope, with traits of artless nature which Pope had not, and with a peculiar felicity in his turns upon words, which he constantly repeated with delightful effect: such as—

> "——His lot, though small,
> He sees that little lot, the lot of all."
>
> * * * * *
>
> "And turn'd and look'd, and turn'd to look again."

As a novelist, his Vicar of Wakefield has charmed all Europe. What reader is there in the civilised world, who is not the better for the story of the washes which the worthy Dr. Primrose demolished so deliberately with the poker—for the knowledge of the guinea which the Miss Primroses kept unchanged in their pockets—the adventure of the picture of the Vicar's family, which could not be got into the house—and that of the Flamborough family, all painted with oranges in their hands—or for the story of the case of shagreen spectacles and the cosmogony?

As a comic writer, his Tony Lumpkin draws forth new powers from Mr. Liston's face. That alone is praise enough for it. Poor Goldsmith! how happy he has made others! how unhappy he was in himself! He never had the pleasure of reading his own works! He had only the satisfaction of good-naturedly relieving the necessities of others, and the consolation of being harassed to death with his own! He is the most amusing and interesting person, in one of the most amusing and interesting books in the world, Boswell's Life of Johnson. His peach-coloured coat shall always bloom in Boswell's writings, and his fame survive in his own!—His genius was a mixture of originality and imitation: he could

do nothing without some model before him, and he could copy nothing that he did not adorn with the graces of his own mind. Almost all the latter part of the Vicar of Wakefield, and a great deal of the former, is taken from Joseph Andrews; but the circumstances I have mentioned above are not.

The finest things he has left behind him in verse are his character of a country school-master, and that prophetic description of Burke in the Retaliation. His moral Essays in the Citizen of the World, are as agreeable chit-chat as can be conveyed in the form of didactic discourses.

Warton was a poet and a scholar, studious with ease, learned without affectation. He had a happiness which some have been prouder of than he, who deserved it less —he was poet-laureat.

> "And that green wreath which decks the bard when dead,
> That laurel garland crown'd his living head."

But he bore his honours meekly, and performed his half-yearly task regularly. I should not have mentioned him for this distinction alone (the highest which a poet can receive from the state), but for another circumstance; I mean his being the author of some of the finest sonnets in the language—at least so they appear to me; and as this species of composition has the necessary advantage of being short, (though it is also sometimes both "tedious and brief,") I will here repeat two or three of them, as treating pleasing subjects in a pleasing and philosophical way.

Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon.

> "Deem not, devoid of elegance, the sage,
> By Fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd,
> Of painful pedantry the poring child;
> Who turns of these proud domes the historic page,
> Now sunk by Time, and Henry's fiercer rage.
> Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smil'd
> On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage
> His thoughts, on themes unclassic falsely styl'd,
> Intent. While cloister'd piety displays
> Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
> New manners, and the pomp of elder days,

Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
Not rough nor barren are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers."

Sonnet. Written at Stonehenge.

"Thou noblest monument of Albion's isle,
Whether, by Merlin's aid, from Scythia's shore
To Amber's fatal plain Pendragon bore,
Huge frame of giant hands, the mighty pile,
T' entomb his Britons slain by Hengist's guile:
Or Druid priests, sprinkled with human gore,
Taught mid thy massy maze their mystic lore:
Or Danish chiefs, enrich'd with savage spoil,
To victory's idol vast, an unhewn shrine,
Rear'd the rude heap, or in thy hallow'd ground
Repose the kings of Brutus' genuine line;
Or here those kings in solemn state were crown'd;
Studious to trace thy wondrous origin,
We muse on many an ancient tale renown'd."

Nothing can be more admirable than the learning here displayed, or the inference from it, that it is of no use but as it leads to interesting thought and reflection.

That written after seeing Wilton House is in the same style, but I prefer concluding with that to the river Lodon, which has a personal as well as poetical interest about it.

"Ah! what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy banks with alders crown'd,
And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
Beneath the azure sky and golden sun:
When first my Muse to lisp her notes begun!
While pensive memory traces back the round
Which fills the varied interval between;
Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.—
Sweet native stream! those skies and suns so pure
No more return, to cheer my evening road!
Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure
Nor useless, all my vacant days have flow'd
From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature,
Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestow'd."

I have thus gone through all the names of this period I could think of, but I find that there are others still waiting behind that I had never thought of. Here is a list of some of them—Pattison, Tickell, Hill, Somerville, Browne, Pitt, Wilkie, Dodsley, Shaw, Smart, Langhorne,

Bruce, Greame, Glover, Lovibond, Penrose, Mickle, Jago, Scott, Whitehead, Jenyns, Logan, Cotton, Cunningham, and Blacklock.—I think it will be best to let them pass and say nothing about them. It will be hard to persuade so many respectable persons that they are dull writers, and if we give them any praise, they will send others.

But here comes one whose claims cannot be so easily set aside: they have been sanctioned by learning, hailed by genius, and hallowed by misfortune—I mean Chatterton. Yet I must say what I think of him, and that is not what is generally thought. I pass over the disputes between the learned antiquaries, Dr. Mills, Herbert Croft, and Dr. Knox, whether he was to be placed after Shakspeare and Dryden, or to come after Shakspeare alone. A living poet has borne a better testimony to him—

> "I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy,
> The sleepless soul that perished in his pride;
> And him[1] who walked in glory and in joy
> Beside his plough along the mountain side."

I am loth to put asunder whom so great an authority has joined together; but I cannot find in Chatterton's works anything so extraordinary as the age at which they were written. They have a facility, vigour, and knowledge, which were prodigious in a boy of sixteen, but which would not have been so in a man of twenty. He did not shew extraordinary powers of genius, but extraordinary precocity. Nor do I believe he would have written better, had he lived. He knew this himself, or he would have lived. Great geniuses, like great kings, have too much to think of to kill themselves; for their mind to them also "a kingdom is." With an unaccountable power coming over him at an unusual age, and with the youthful confidence it inspired, he performed wonders, and was willing to set a seal on his reputation by a tragic catastrophe. He had done his best; and, like another Empedocles, threw himself into Ætna, to ensure immortality. The brazen slippers alone remain!—

[1] Burns. — These lines are taken from the introduction to Mr. Wordsworth's poem of the LEECH-GATHERER.

LECTURE VII

ON BURNS, AND THE OLD ENGLISH BALLADS

I AM sorry that what I said in the conclusion of the last Lecture respecting Chatterton, should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree on all such matters. What I meant was less to call in question Chatterton's genius, than to object to the common mode of estimating its magnitude by its prematureness. The lists of fame are not filled with the dates of births or deaths ; and the side-mark of the age at which they were done, wears out in works destined for immortality. Had Chatterton really done more, we should have thought less of him, for our attention would then have been fixed on the excellence of the works themselves, instead of the singularity of the circumstances in which they were produced. But because he attained to the full powers of manhood at an early age, I do not see that he would have attained to more than those powers, had he lived to be a man. He was a prodigy, because in him the ordinary march of nature was violently precipitated ; and it is therefore inferred, that he would have continued to hold on his course, "unslacked of motion." On the contrary, who knows but he might have lived to be poet-laureat ? It is much better to let him remain as he was. Of his actual productions, any one may think as highly as he pleases ; I would only guard against adding to the account of his *quantum meruit*, those possible productions by which the learned rhapsodists of his time raised his gigantic pretensions to an equality with those of Homer and Shakspeare. It is amusing to read some of these exaggerated descriptions, each rising above the other in extravagance. In Anderson's Life, we find that Mr. Warton speaks of him "as a prodigy of genius," as "a singular instance of prematurity of abilities : " that may be true enough, and Warton was at any rate a competent judge ; but Mr.

Malone "believes him to have been the greatest genius that England has produced since the days of Shakspeare." Dr. Gregory says, "he must rank, as a universal genius, above Dryden, and perhaps only second to Shakspeare." Mr. Herbert Croft is still more unqualified in his praises; he asserts, that "no such being, at any period of life, has ever been known, or possibly ever will be known." He runs a parallel between Chatterton and Milton; and asserts, "that an army of Macedonian and Swedish mad butchers fly before him," meaning, I suppose, that Alexander the Great and Charles the Twelfth were nothing to him: "nor," he adds, "does my memory supply me with any human being, who at such an age, with such advantages, has produced such compositions. Under the heathen mythology, superstition and admiration would have explained all, by bringing Apollo on earth; nor would the God ever have descended with more credit to himself."—Chatterton's physiognomy would at least have enabled him to pass *incognito*. It is quite different from the look of timid wonder and delight with which Annibal Caracci has painted a young Apollo listening to the first sounds he draws from a Pan's pipe, under the tutelage of the old Silenus! If Mr. Croft is sublime on the occasion, Dr. Knox is no less pathetic. "The testimony of Dr. Knox," says Dr. Anderson, (Essays, p. 144), "does equal credit to the classical taste and amiable benevolence of the writer, and the genius and reputation of Chatterton." "When I read," says the Doctor, "the researches of those learned antiquaries who have endeavoured to prove that the poems attributed to Rowley were really written by him, I observe many ingenious remarks in confirmation of their opinion, which it would be tedious, if not difficult, to controvert."

Now this is so far from the mark, that the whole controversy might have been settled by any one but the learned antiquaries themselves, who had the smallest share of their learning, from this single circumstance, that the poems read as smooth as any modern poems, if you read them as modern compositions; and that you cannot read

them, or make verse of them at all, if you pronounce or accent the words as they were spoken at the time when the poems were pretended to have been written. The whole secret of the imposture, which nothing but a deal of learned dust, raised by collecting and removing a great deal of learned rubbish, could have prevented our laborious critics from seeing through, lies on the face of it (to say nothing of the burlesque air which is scarcely disguised throughout) in the repetition of a few obsolete words, and in the mis-spelling of common ones.

"No sooner," proceeds the Doctor, "do I turn to the poems, than the labour of the antiquaries appears only waste of time; and I am involuntarily forced to join in placing that laurel, which he seems so well to have deserved, on the brow of Chatterton. The poems bear so many marks of superior genius, that they have deservedly excited the general attention of polite scholars, and are considered as the most remarkable productions in modern poetry. We have many instances of poetical eminence at an early age; but neither Cowley, Milton, nor Pope, ever produced any thing while they were boys, which can justly be compared to the poems of Chatterton. The learned antiquaries do not indeed dispute their excellence. They extol it in the highest terms of applause. They raise their favourite Rowley to a rivalry with Homer: but they make the very merits of the works an argument against their real author. Is it possible, say they, that a boy should produce compositions so beautiful and masterly? That a common boy should produce them is not possible," rejoins the Doctor; "but that they should be produced by a boy of an extraordinary genius, such as was that of Homer or Shakspeare, though a prodigy, is such a one as by no means exceeds the bounds of rational credibility."

Now it does not appear that Shakspeare or Homer were such early prodigies; so that by this reasoning he must take precedence of them too, as well as of Milton, Cowley, and Pope. The reverend and classical writer then breaks out into the following melancholy raptures:—

"Unfortunate boy! short and evil were thy days, but thy fame shall be immortal. Hadst thou been known to the munificent patrons of genius . . . . . .

"Unfortunate boy! poorly wast thou accommodated during thy short sojourning here among us;—rudely wast thou treated—sorely did thy feelings suffer from the scorn of the unworthy; and there are at last those who wish to rob thee of thy only meed, thy posthumous glory. Severe too are the censures of thy morals. In the gloomy moments of despondency, I fear thou hast uttered impious and blasphemous thoughts. But let thy more rigid censors reflect, that thou wast literally and strictly but a boy. Let many of thy bitterest enemies reflect what were their own religious principles, and whether they had any at the age of fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. Surely it is a severe and an unjust surmise that thou wouldst probably have ended thy life as a victim to the laws, if thou hadst not ended it as thou didst."

Enough, enough, of the learned antiquaries, and of the classical and benevolent testimony of Dr. Knox. Chatterton was, indeed, badly enough off; but he was at least saved from the pain and shame of reading this woful lamentation over fallen genius, which circulates splendidly bound in the fourteenth edition, while he is a prey to worms. As to those who are really capable of admiring Chatterton's genius, or of feeling an interest in his fate, I would only say, that I never heard any one speak of any one of his works as if it were an old well-known favourite, and had become a faith and a religion in his mind. It is his name, his youth, and what he might have lived to have done, that excite our wonder and admiration. He has the same sort of posthumous fame that an actor of the last age has—an abstracted reputation which is independent of any thing we know of his works. The admirers of Collins never think of him without recalling to their minds his Ode on Evening, or on the Poetical Character. Gray's Elegy, and his poetical popularity, are identified together, and inseparable even in imagination. It is the same with respect to Burns: when you speak of him as a poet, you

mean his works, his Tam o' Shanter, or his Cotter's Saturday Night. But the enthusiasts for Chatterton, if you ask for the proofs of his extraordinary genius, are obliged to turn to the volume, and perhaps find there what they seek ; but it is not in their minds ; and it is of *that* I spoke.

The Minstrel's song in Ælla I think the best.

"O ! synge untoe my roundelaie,
O ! droppe the brynie teare wythe mee,
Daunce ne moe atte hallie daie,
Lycke a rennynge ryver bee.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Black hys cryne as the wyntere nyght,
Whyte hys rode as the sommer snowe,
Rodde hys face as the mornynge lyghte,
Cale he lyes ynne the grave belowe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Swote hys tongue as the throstles note,
Quycke ynne daunce as thought cann bee,
Defte his taboure, codgelle stote,
O ! hee lys bie the wyllowe-tree.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Harke ! the ravenne flappes hys wynge,
In the briered dell belowe ;
Harke ! the dethe-owle loude dothe synge,
To the nyghte-mares as theie goe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

See ! the whyte moone sheenes onne hie ;
Whyterre ys mie true loves shroude ;
Whyterre thanne the mornynge skie,
Whyterre thanne the evenynge cloude.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree,

Heere, upon mie true loves grave,
Schalle the baren fleurs be layde,
Ne one hallie seyncte to save
Al the celness of a mayde.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to his deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Wythe mie hondes I'll dent the brieres
Rounde hys hallie corse to gre,
Ouphante fairies, lyghte your fyres,
Heere mie boddie stille shalle bee.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Comme, wythe acorne-coppe and thorne,
Drayne my hartys blodde awaie;
Lyfe and all yttes goode I scorne,
Daunce bie nete, or feaste by daie.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Water wytches, crownede whithe reytes,
Bere mee to yer leathalle tyde.
I die; I comme; mie true love waytes.
Thos the damselle spake, and dyed."

To proceed to the more immediate subject of the present Lecture, the character and writings of Burns.—Shakspeare says of some one, that "he was like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring." Burns, the poet, was not such a man. He had a strong mind, and a strong body, the fellow to it. He had a real heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom—you can almost hear it throb. Some one said, that if you had shaken hands with him, his hand would have burnt yours. The Gods, indeed, "made him poetical;" but nature had a hand in him first. His heart was in the right place. He did not "create a soul under the ribs of death," by tinkling siren sounds, or by piling up centos of poetic diction; but for the artificial flowers of poetry, he plucked the mountain-daisy under his feet; and a field-mouse, hurrying from its ruined dwelling, could inspire him with the sentiments of terror and pity. He held the plough or the pen with the same

firm, manly grasp ; nor did he cut out poetry as we cut out watch-papers, with finical dexterity, nor from the same flimsy materials. Burns was not like Shakspeare in the range of his genius ; but there is something of the same magnanimity, directness, and unaffected character about him. He was not a sickly sentimentalist, a namby-pamby poet, a mincing metre ballad-monger, any more than Shakspeare. He would as soon hear "a brazen candlestick tuned, or a dry wheel grate on the axletree." He was as much of a man—not a twentieth part as much of a poet as Shakspeare. With but little of his imagination or inventive power, he had the same life of mind ; within the narrow circle of personal feeling or domestic incidents, the pulse of his poetry flows as healthily and vigorously. He had an eye to see ; a heart to feel :—no more. His pictures of good fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to any thing ; they come up to nature, and they cannot go beyond it. The sly jest collected in his laughing eye at the sight of the grotesque and ludicrous in manners—the large tear rolled down his manly cheek at the sight of another's distress. He has made us as well acquainted with himself as it is possible to be ; has let out the honest impulses of his native disposition, the unequal conflict of the passions in his breast, with the same frankness and truth of description. His strength is not greater than his weakness : his virtues were greater than his vices. His virtues belonged to his genius : his vices to his situation, which did not correspond to his genius.

It has been usual to attack Burns's moral character, and the moral tendency of his writings at the same time ; and Mr. Wordsworth, in a letter to Mr. Gray, Master of the High School at Edinburgh, in attempting to defend, has only laid him open to a more serious and unheard-of responsibility. Mr. Gray might very well have sent him back, in return, for his epistle, the answer of Holofernes in Love's Labour Lost :—"*Via* goodman Dull, thou hast spoken no word all this while." The author of this performance, which is as weak in effect as it is pompous in pretension, shews a great dislike of Robespierre, Buona-

parte, and of Mr. Jeffrey, whom he, by some unaccountable fatality, classes together as the three most formidable enemies of the human race that have appeared in his (Mr. Wordsworth's) remembrance ; but he betrays very little liking to Burns. He is, indeed, anxious to get him out of the unhallowed clutches of the Edinburgh Reviewers (as a mere matter of poetical privilege), only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own ; and after repeating and insinuating ponderous charges against him, shakes his head, and declines giving any opinion in so tremendous a case ; so that though the judgment of the former critic is set aside, poor Burns remains just where he was, and nobody gains any thing by the cause but Mr. Wordsworth, in an increasing opinion of his own wisdom and purity. "Out upon this half-faced fellowship!" The author of the Lyrical Ballads has thus missed a fine opportunity of doing Burns justice and himself honour. He might have shewn himself a philosophical prose-writer, as well as a philosophical poet. He might have offered as amiable and as gallant a defence of the Muses, as my uncle Toby, in the honest simplicity of his heart, did of the army. He might have said at once, instead of making a parcel of wry faces over the matter, that Burns had written Tam o' Shanter, and that that alone was enough ; that he could hardly have described the excesses of mad, hair-brained, roaring mirth and convivial indulgence, which are the soul of it, if he himself had not "drunk full ofter of the ton than of the well"—unless "the act and practique part of life had been the mistress of his theorique." Mr. Wordsworth might have quoted such lines as—

> "The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
> Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious ;"—

or,

> "Care, mad to see a man so happy,
> E'en drown'd himself among the nappy ;"—

and fairly confessed that he could not have written such lines from a want of proper habits and previous sympathy ; and that till some great puritanical genius should arise to do these things equally well without any knowledge of

them, the world might forgive Burns the injuries he had done his health and fortune in his poetical apprenticeship to experience, for the pleasure he had afforded them. Instead of this, Mr. Wordsworth hints, that with different personal habits and greater strength of mind, Burns would have written differently, and almost as well as *he* does. He might have taken that line of Gay's,

"The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets,"—

and applied it in all its force and pathos to the poetical character. He might have argued that poets are men of genius, and that a man of genius is not a machine ; that they live in a state of intellectual intoxication, and that it is too much to expect them to be distinguished by peculiar *sang froid*, circumspection, and sobriety. Poets are by nature men of stronger imagination and keener sensibilities than others ; and it is a contradiction to suppose them at the same time governed only by the cool, dry, calculating dictates of reason and foresight. Mr. Wordsworth might have ascertained the boundaries that part the provinces of reason and imagination :—that it is the business of the understanding to exhibit things in their relative proportions and ultimate consequences—of the imagination to insist on their immediate impressions, and to indulge their strongest impulses ; but it is the poet's office to pamper the imagination of his readers and his own with the extremes of present ecstacy or agony, to snatch the swift-winged golden minutes, the torturing hour, and to banish the dull, prosaic, monotonous realities of life, both from his thoughts and from his practice. Mr. Wordsworth might have shewn how it is that all men of genius, or of originality and independence of mind, are liable to practical errors, from the very confidence their superiority inspires, which makes them fly in the face of custom and prejudice, always rashly, sometimes unjustly ; for, after all, custom and prejudice are not without foundation in truth and reason, and no one individual is a match for the world in power, very few in knowledge. The world may altogether be set down as older and wiser than any single person in it.

Again, our philosophical letter-writer might have enlarged on the temptations to which Burns was exposed from his struggles with fortune and the uncertainty of his fate. He might have shewn how a poet, not born to wealth or title, was kept in a constant state of feverish anxiety with respect to his fame and the means of a precarious livelihood: that "from being chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt, he had passed into the sunshine of fortune, and was lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour;" yet even there could not count on the continuance of success, but was, "like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep!" He might have traced his habit of ale-house tippling to the last long precious draught of his favourite usquebaugh, which he took in the prospect of bidding farewell for ever to his native land; and his conjugal infidelities to his first disappointment in love, which would not have happened to him, if he had been born to a small estate in land, or bred up behind a counter!

Lastly, Mr. Wordsworth might have shown the incompatibility between the Muses and the Excise, which never agreed well together, or met in one seat, till they were unaccountably reconciled on Rydal Mount. He must know (no man better) the distraction created by the opposite calls of business and of fancy, the torment of extents, the plague of receipts laid in order or mislaid, the disagreeableness of exacting penalties or paying the forfeiture; and how all this (together with the broaching of casks and the splashing of beer-barrels) must have preyed upon a mind like Burns, with more than his natural sensibility and none of his acquired firmness.

Mr. Coleridge, alluding to the circumstance of the promotion of the Scottish Bard to be "a gauger of ale-firkins," in a poetical epistle to his friend Charles Lamb, calls upon him in a burst of heartfelt indignation, to gather a wreath of henbane, nettles, and nightshade,

"——— To twine
The illustrious brow of Scotch nobility."

If, indeed, Mr. Lamb had undertaken to write a letter in defence of Burns, how different would it have been from this of Mr. Wordsworth's! How much better than I can even imagine it to have been done!

It is hardly reasonable to look for a hearty or genuine defence of Burns from the pen of Mr. Wordsworth; for there is no common link of sympathy between them. Nothing can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry. Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of mere sentiment and pensive contemplation: Burns's is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence. With Burns, "self-love and social are the same"—

> "And we'll tak a cup of kindness yet,
> For auld lang syne."

Mr. Wordsworth is "himself alone," a recluse, philosopher, or a reluctant spectator of the scenes of many-coloured life; moralising on them, not describing, not entering into them. Robert Burns has exerted all the vigour of his mind, all the happiness of his nature, in exalting the pleasures of wine, of love, and good fellowship: but in Mr. Wordsworth there is a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body; the banns are forbid, or a separation is austerely pronounced from bed and board—*a mensâ et thoro*. From the Lyrical Ballads, it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry or are given in marriage. If we lived by every sentiment that proceeded out of mouths, and not by bread or wine, or if the species were continued like trees (to borrow an expression from the great Sir Thomas Brown), Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would be just as good as ever. It is not so with Burns: he is "famous for the keeping of it up," and in his verse is ever fresh and gay. For this, it seems, he has fallen under the displeasure of the Edinburgh Reviewers, and the still more formidable patronage of Mr. Wordsworth's pen.

> "This, this was the unkindest cut of all."

I was going to give some extracts out of this composition in support of what I have said, but I find them too tedious. Indeed (if I may be allowed to speak my whole

mind, under correction) Mr. Wordsworth could not be in any way expected to tolerate or give a favourable interpretation to Burns's constitutional foibles—even his best virtues are not good enough for him. He is repelled and driven back into himself, not less by the worth than by the faults of others. His taste is as exclusive and repugnant as his genius. It is because so few things give him pleasure, that he gives pleasure to so few people. It is not every one who can perceive the sublimity of a daisy, or the pathos to be extracted from a withered thorn!

To proceed from Burns's patrons to his poetry, than which no two things can be more different. His "Twa Dogs" is a very spirited piece of description, both as it respects the animal and human creation, and conveys a very vivid idea of the manners both of high and low life. The burlesque panegyric of the first dog,

> "His locked, lettered, braw brass collar
> Shew'd him the gentleman and scholar"—

reminds one of Launce's account of his dog Crabbe, where he is said, as an instance of his being in the way of promotion, "to have got among three or four gentlemen-like dogs under the Duke's table." The "Halloween" is the most striking and picturesque description of local customs and scenery. The Brigs of Ayr, the Address to a Haggis, Scotch Drink, and innumerable others are, however, full of the same kind of characteristic and comic painting. But his master-piece in this way is his Tam o' Shanter. I shall give the beginning of it, but I am afraid I shall hardly know when to leave off.

> "When chapman billies leave the street,
> And drouthy neebors, neebors meet,
> As market-days are wearing late,
> And folk begin to tak the gate;
> While we sit boosing at the nappy,
> And getting fou and unco happy,
> We think na on the lang Scots miles,
> The mosses, waters, slaps, and stiles,
> That lie between us and our hame,
> Whare sits our sulky sullen dame,
> Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
> Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter;
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonny lasses.)

O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise,
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October
Ae market-day thou wast na sober?
That ilka melder, wi' the miller,
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on:
That at the Lord's house, ev'n on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday—
She prophesy'd, that late or soon,
Thou wad be found deep drown'd in Doon!
Or catch't wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels sweet,
How mony lengthen'd, sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale: Ae market night,
Tam had got planted unco right
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Souter Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
Tam lo'ed him like a very brither;
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better:
The landlady and Tam grew gracious
Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious:
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd himself amang the nappy;
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r—its bloom is shed ;
Or like the snow, falls in the river,
A moment white, then melts for ever ;
Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place :
Or like the rainbow's lovely form—
Evanishing amid the storm.—
Nae man can tether time or tide,
The hour approaches, Tam maun ride :
That hour o' night's black arch the key-stane,
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in,
And sic a night he taks the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast,
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd,
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd :
That night a child might understand
The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his grey mare, Meg,
A better never lifted leg,
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
Despising wind, and rain, and fire ;
Whiles haulding fast his gude blue bonnet ;
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots' sonnet ;
Whiles glowring round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares ;
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.—

By this time Tam was cross the ford,
Whare in the snaw the chapman smoor'd ;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane ;
And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Where hunters fand the murder'd bairn ;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Whare Mungo's mither hang'd hersel.—
Before him Doon pours all his floods ;
The doubling storm roars through the woods ;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole ;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
Whan, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze ;
Through ilka bore the beams were glancing,
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn !
What dangers thou canst make us scorn !
Wi' Tippenny, we fear nae evil,
Wi' Usqueba, we'll face the devil !
The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
Fair play, he car'd na de'ils a boddle.
But Maggie stood right sair astonish'd,
Till by the heel and hand admonish'd,
She ventur'd forward on the light,
And, vow ! Tam saw an unco sight !
Warlocks and witches in a dance,
Nae light cotillion new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.
As winnock-bunker, in the east,
There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
A touzie tyke, black, grim, and large;
To gie them music was his charge;
He screw'd the pipes, and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.—
Coffins stood round like open presses,
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses:
And, by some devilish cantrip slight,
Each in his cauld hand held a light—
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table,
A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;
A thief, new cutted frae a rape,
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks wi' bluid red rusted;
Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;
A garter, which a babe had strangled;
A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,
The grey hairs yet stack to the heft;
Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',
Which e'en to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glowr'd amaz'd, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious;
The Piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew;
They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
Till ilka Carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sark !

Now Tam, O Tam ! had they been queans
A' plump and strapping in their teens ;
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hundred linen !
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them aff my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies !

But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Louping and flinging on a crummock,
I wonder did na turn thy stomach.

But Tam ken'd what was what fu' brawly,
There was ae winsome wench and waly,
That night enlisted in the core,
(Lang after ken'd on Carrick shore ;
For mony a beast to dead she shot,
And perish'd mony a bonnie boat,
And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
And kept the country-side in fear—)
Her cutty sark o' Paisley harn,
That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vaunty.—
Ah ! little ken'd thy reverend grannie,
That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,
Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),
Wad ever grace a dance o' witches !

But here my Muse her wing maun cour ;
Sic flights are far beyond her power :
To sing how Nannie lap and flang,
(A souple jade she was, and strang)
And how Tam stood like ane bewitch'd,
And thought his very een enrich'd :
Ev'n Satan glowr'd and fidg'd fu' fain,
And hotch't, and blew wi' might and main ;
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason a' thegither,
And roars out, "Weel done, Cutty Sark !"
And in an instant all was dark ;
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees biz out wi' angry fyke
When plundering herds assail their byke ;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop ! she starts before their nose ;

As eager rins the market crowd,
When "Catch the thief!" resounds aloud;
So Maggie rins—the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch skreech an hollow.

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin'!
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin'!
Kate soon will be a waefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane o' the brig;
There, at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross;
But ere the key-stane she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake!
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;
But little wist she Maggie's mettle—
Ae spring brought aff her master hale,
But left behind her ain grey tail:
The Carlin claught her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son tak heed:
Whane'er to drink you are inclin'd,
Or Cutty Sarks rin in your mind,
Think, ye may buy the joys owre dear;
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare."

Burns has given the extremes of licentious eccentricity and convivial enjoyment, in the story of this scape-grace, and of patriarchal simplicity and gravity in describing the old national character of the Scottish peasantry. The Cotter's Saturday Night is a noble and pathetic picture of human manners, mingled with a fine religious awe. It comes over the mind like a slow and solemn strain of music. The soul of the poet aspires from this scene of low-thoughted care, and reposes, in trembling hope, on "the bosom of its Father and its God." Hardly any thing can be more touching than the following stanzas, for instance, whether as they describe human interests, or breathe a lofty devotional spirit.

"The toil-worn Cotter frae his labour goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,

Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree ;
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin noise and glee.
His wee-bit ingle, blinkin bonilie,
His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wifie's smile,
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

Belyve, the elder bairns come drappin in,
At service out, amang the farmers roun',
Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
A cannie errand to a neebor town ;
Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman-grown,
In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
Comes hame, perhaps, to shew a braw new gown,
Or deposite her sair-won penny-fee,
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

Wi' joy unfeign'd, brothers and sisters meet,
An' each for other's welfare kindly spiers ;
The social hours, swift-wing'd, unnotic'd fleet :
Each tells the uncos that he sees or hears :
The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years ;
Anticipation forward points the view ;
The mither, wi' her needle an' her shears,
Gars auld claes look amaist as weel's the new :
The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

* * * * * * *

But, hark! a rap comes gently to the door ;
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
Tells how a neebor lad cam o'er the moor,
To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
The wily mother sees the conscious flame
Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek ;
With heart-struck, anxious care, inquires his name,
While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak ;
Weel pleas'd the mother hears it's nae wild, worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben ;
A strappan youth ; he taks the mother's eye ;
Blithe Jenny sees the visit's no ill ta'en ;
The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,

But blate an' laithfu', scarce can weel behave;
The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
What makes the youth sae bashfu' an' sae grave;
Weel-pleas'd to think her bairn's respected like the lave.

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food:
The soupe their only hawkie does afford,
That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood:
The dame brings forth, in complimental mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell,
An' aft he's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid;
The frugal wifie, garrulous, will tell,
How 'twas a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big ha'-Bible, ance his father's pride:
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion wi' judicious care;
And "Let us worship God!" he says, with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim:
Perhaps Dundee's wild-warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name;
Or noble Elgin beets the heav'n-ward flame;
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays:
Compar'd with these, Italian trills are tame;
The tickled ears no heart-felt raptures raise;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise."—

Burns's poetical epistles to his friends are admirable, whether for the touches of satire, the painting of character, or the sincerity of friendship they display. Those to Captain Grose, and to Davie, a brother poet, are among the best:—they are "the true pathos and sublime of human life." His prose-letters are sometimes tinctured with affectation. They seem written by a man who has been admired for his wit, and is expected on all occasions to shine. Those in which he expresses his ideas of natural beauty in reference to Alison's Essay on Taste, and advocates the keeping up the remembrances of old customs and seasons, are the most powerfully written. His English serious odes and moral stanzas are, in

general, failures, such as The Lament, Man was made to Mourn, &c. nor do I much admire his "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled." In this strain of didactic or sentimental moralising, the lines to Glencairn are the most happy, and impressive. His imitations of the old humorous ballad style of Ferguson's songs are no whit inferior to the admirable originals, such as "John Anderson, my Joe," and many more. But of all his productions, the pathetic and serious love-songs which he has left behind him, in the manner of the old ballads, are perhaps those which take the deepest and most lasting hold of the mind. Such are the lines to Mary Morison, and those entitled Jessy.

"Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet,
And soft as their parting tear—Jessy!

Altho' thou maun never be mine,
Altho' even hope is denied;
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing,
Than aught in the world beside—Jessy!"

The conclusion of the other is as follows.

"Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw.
Tho' this was fair, and that was bra',
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed and said among them a',
Ye are na' Mary Morison."

That beginning, "Oh gin my love were a bonny red rose," is a piece of rich and fantastic description. One would think that nothing could surpass these in beauty of expression, and in true pathos: and nothing does or can, but some of the old Scotch ballads themselves. There is in them a still more original cast of thought, a more romantic imagery—the thistle's glittering down, the gilliflower on the old garden-wall, the horseman's silver bells, the hawk on its perch—a closer intimacy with nature, a firmer reliance on it, as the only stock of wealth which

the mind has to resort to, a more infantine simplicity of manners, a greater strength of affection, hopes longer cherished and longer deferred, sighs that the heart dare hardly heave, and "thoughts that often lie too deep for tears." We seem to feel that those who wrote and sung them (the early minstrels) lived in the open air, wandering on from place to place with restless feet and thoughts, and lending an ever-open ear to the fearful accidents of war or love, floating on the breath of old tradition or common fame, and moving the strings of their harp with sounds that sank into a nation's heart. How fine an illustration of this is that passage in Don Quixote, where the knight and Sancho, going in search of Dulcinea, inquire their way of the countryman, who is driving his mules to plough before break of day, "singing the ancient ballad of Roncesvalles." Sir Thomas Overbury describes his country girl as still accompanied with fragments of old songs. One of the best and most striking descriptions of the effects of this mixture of national poetry and music is to be found in one of the letters of Archbishop Herring, giving an account of a confirmation-tour in the mountains of Wales.

"That pleasure over, our work became very arduous, for we were to mount a rock, and in many places of the road, over natural stairs of stone. I submitted to this, which they told me was but a taste of the country, and to prepare me for worse things to come. However, worse things did not come that morning, for we dined soon after out of our own wallets; and though our inn stood in a place of the most frightful solitude, and the best formed for the habitation of monks (who once possessed it) in the world, yet we made a cheerful meal. The novelty of the thing gave me spirits, and the air gave me appetite much keener than the knife I ate with. We had our music too; for there came in a harper, who soon drew about us a group of figures that Hogarth would have given any price for. The harper was in his true place and attitude; a man and woman stood before him, singing to his instrument wildly, but not disagreeably; a little dirty child was playing with the bottom of the harp; a woman in a sick night-cap hanging over the stairs; a boy with crutches fixed in a staring attention, and a girl carding wool in the chimney, and rocking a cradle with her naked feet, interrupted in her business by the charms of the music; all ragged and dirty, and all silently attentive. These figures gave us a most entertaining picture, and would please you or any man of observation; and one reflection gave me a particular comfort, that the assembly before us

demonstrated, that even here, the influential sun warmed poor mortals, and inspired them with love and music."

I could wish that Mr. Wilkie had been recommended to take this group as the subject of his admirable pencil; he has painted a picture of Bathsheba, instead.

In speaking of the old Scotch ballads, I need do no more than mention the name of Auld Robin Gray. The effect of reading this old ballad is as if all our hopes and fears hung upon the last fibre of the heart, and we felt that giving way. What silence, what loneliness, what leisure for grief and despair!

"My father pressed me sair,
Though my mother did na' speak;
But she looked in my face
Till my heart was like to break."

The irksomeness of the situations, the sense of painful dependence, is excessive; and yet the sentiment of deep-rooted, patient affection triumphs over all, and is the only impression that remains. Lady Ann Bothwell's Lament is not, I think, quite equal to the lines beginning—

"O waly, waly, up the bank,
And waly, waly, down the brae,
And waly, waly, yon burn side,
Where I and my love wont to gae.
I leant my back unto an aik,
I thought it was a trusty tree;
But first it bow'd, and syne it brak,
Sae my true-love's forsaken me.

O waly, waly, love is bonny,
A little time while it is new;
But when its auld, it waxeth cauld,
And fades awa' like the morning dew.
Whan cockle-shells turn siller bells,
And muscles grow on every tree,
Whan frost and snaw sall warm us aw
Then sall my love prove true to me.

Now Arthur seat sall be my bed,
The sheets sall ne'er be fyld by me:
Saint Anton's well sall be my drink,
Since my true-love's forsaken me.

Martinmas wind, when wilt thou blaw,
And shake the green leaves aff the tree ?
O gentle death, whan wilt thou cum,
And tak' a life that wearies me !

'Tis not the frost that freezes sae,
Nor blawing snaw's inclemencie,
'Tis not sic cauld, that makes me cry,
But my love's heart grown cauld to me.
Whan we came in by Glasgow town,
We were a comely sight to see,
My love was clad in black velvet,
And I myself in cramasie.

But had I wist before I kist,
That love had been sae hard to win ;
I'd lockt my heart in case of gowd,
And pinn'd it with a siller pin.
And oh ! if my poor babe were born,
And set upon the nurse's knee,
And I mysel in the cold grave !
Since my true-love's forsaken me."

The finest modern imitation of this style is the Braes of Yarrow ; and perhaps the finest subject for a story of the same kind in any modern book, is that told in Turner's History of England, of a Mahometan woman, who having fallen in love with an English merchant, the father of Thomas à Becket, followed him all the way to England, knowing only the word London, and the name of her lover, Gilbert.

But to have done with this, which is rather too serious a subject.—The old English ballads are of a gayer and more lively turn. They are adventurous and romantic ; but they relate chiefly to good living and good fellowship, to drinking and hunting scenes. Robin Hood is the chief of these, and he still, in imagination, haunts Sherwood Forest. The archers green glimmer under the waving branches ; the print on the grass remains where they have just finished their noon-tide meal under the green-wood tree ; and the echo of their bugle-horn and twanging bows resounds through the tangled mazes of the forest, as the tall slim deer glances startled by.

" The trees in Sherwood Forest are old and good ;
The grass beneath them now is dimly green :

Are they deserted all? Is no young mien,
With loose-slung bugle, met within the wood?
No arrow found—foil'd of its antler'd food—
Struck in the oak's rude side?—Is there nought seen
To mark the revelries which there have been,
In the sweet days of merry Robin Hood?

Go there with summer, and with evening—go
In the soft shadows, like some wand'ring man—
And thou shalt far amid the forest know
The archer-men in green, with belt and bow,
Feasting on pheasant, river-fowl, and swan,
With Robin at their head, and Marian."[1]

LECTURE VIII

ON THE LIVING POETS

"No more of talk where God or Angel guest
With man, as with his friend, familiar us'd
To sit indulgent."———

Genius is the heir of fame; but the hard condition on which the bright reversion must be earned is the loss of life. Fame is the recompense not of the living, but of the dead. The temple of fame stands upon the grave: the flame that burns upon its altars is kindled from the ashes of great men. Fame itself is immortal, but it is not begot till the breath of genius is extinguished. For fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour or of friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable. It is the power which the intellect exercises over the intellect, and the lasting homage which is paid to it, as such, independently of time and circumstances, purified from partiality and evil-speaking. Fame is the sound which the stream of high

[1] Sonnet on Sherwood Forest, by J. H. Reynolds, Esq.

thoughts, carried down to future ages, makes as it flows—deep, distant, murmuring evermore like the waters of the mighty ocean. He who has ears truly touched to this music, is in a manner deaf to the voice of popularity.—The love of fame differs from mere vanity in this, that the one is immediate and personal, the other ideal and abstracted. It is not the direct and gross homage paid to himself, that the lover of true fame seeks or is proud of; but the indirect and pure homage paid to the eternal forms of truth and beauty as they are reflected in his mind, that gives him confidence and hope. The love of nature is the first thing in the mind of the true poet: the admiration of himself the last. A man of genius cannot well be a coxcomb; for his mind is too full of other things to be much occupied with his own person. He who is conscious of great powers in himself, has also a high standard of excellence with which to compare his efforts: he appeals also to a test and judge of merit, which is the highest, but which is too remote, grave, and impartial, to flatter his self-love extravagantly, or puff him up with intolerable and vain conceit. This, indeed, is one test of genius and of real greatness of mind, whether a man can wait patiently and calmly for the award of posterity, satisfied with the unwearied exercise of his faculties, retired within the sanctuary of his own thoughts; or whether he is eager to forestall his own immortality, and mortgage it for a newspaper puff. He who thinks much of himself, will be in danger of being forgotten by the rest of the world: he who is always trying to lay violent hands on reputation, will not secure the best and most lasting. If the restless candidate for praise takes no pleasure, no sincere and heartfelt delight in his works, but as they are admired and applauded by others, what should others see in them to admire or applaud? They cannot be expected to admire them because they are *his;* but for the truth and nature contained in them, which must first be inly felt and copied with severe delight, from the love of truth and nature, before it can ever appear there. Was Raphael, think you, when he painted his pictures of the Virgin and Child in all

their inconceivable truth and beauty of expression, thinking most of his subject or of himself? Do you suppose that Titian, when he painted a landscape, was pluming himself on being thought the finest colourist in the world, or making himself so by looking at nature? Do you imagine that Shakspeare, when he wrote Lear or Othello, was thinking of any thing but Lear and Othello? Or that Mr. Kean, when he plays these characters, is thinking of the audience?—No: he who would be great in the eyes of others, must first learn to be nothing in his own. The love of fame, as it enters at times into his mind, is only another name for the love of excellence; or it is the ambition to attain the highest excellence, sanctioned by the highest authority—that of time.

Those minds, then, which are the most entitled to expect it, can best put up with the postponement of their claims to lasting fame. They can afford to wait. They are not afraid that truth and nature will ever wear out; will lose their gloss with novelty, or their effect with fashion. If their works have the seeds of immortality in them, they will live; if they have not, they care little about them as theirs. They do not complain of the start which others have got of them in the race of everlasting renown, or of the impossibility of attaining the honours which time alone can give, during the term of their natural lives. They know that no applause, however loud and violent, can anticipate or over-rule the judgment of posterity; that the opinion of no one individual, nor of any one generation, can have the weight, the authority (to say nothing of the force of sympathy and prejudice), which must belong to that of successive generations. The brightest living reputation cannot be equally imposing to the imagination, with that which is covered and rendered venerable with the hoar of innumerable ages. No modern production can have the same atmosphere of sentiment around it, as the remains of classical antiquity. But then our moderns may console themselves with the reflection, that they will be old in their turn, and will either be remembered with still increasing honours, or quite forgotten!

I would speak of the living poets as I have spoken of the dead (for I think highly of many of them); but I cannot speak of them with the same reverence, because I do not feel it; with the same confidence, because I cannot have the same authority to sanction my opinion. I cannot be absolutely certain that any body, twenty years hence, will think any thing about any of them; but we may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakspeare will be remembered twenty years hence. We are, therefore, not without excuse if we husband our enthusiasm a little, and do not prematurely lay out our whole stock in untried ventures, and what may turn out to be false bottoms. I have myself out-lived one generation of favourite poets, the Darwins, the Hayleys, the Sewards. Who reads them now?—If, however, I have not the verdict of posterity to bear me out in bestowing the most unqualified praises on their immediate successors, it is also to be remembered, that neither does it warrant me in condemning them. Indeed, it was not my wish to go into this ungrateful part of the subject; but something of the sort is expected from me, and I must run the gauntlet as well as I can. Another circumstance that adds to the difficulty of doing justice to all parties is, that I happen to have had a personal acquaintance with some of these jealous voteries of the Muses; and that is not the likeliest way to imbibe a high opinion of the rest. Poets do not praise one another in the language of hyperbole. I am afraid, therefore, that I labour under a degree of prejudice against some of the most popular poets of the day, from an early habit of deference to the critical opinions of some of the least popular. I cannot say that I ever learnt much about Shakspeare or Milton, Spenser or Chaucer, from these professed guides; for I never heard them say much about them. They were always talking of themselves and one another. Nor am I certain that this sort of personal intercourse with living authors, while it takes away all real relish or freedom of opinion with regard to their contemporaries, greatly enhances our respect for themselves. Poets are not ideal beings; but have their prose-

sides, like the commonest of the people. We often hear persons say, What they would have given to have seen Shakspeare! For my part, I would give a great deal not to have seen him; at least, if he was at all like any body else that I have ever seen. But why should he; for his works are not! This is, doubtless, one great advantage which the dead have over the living. It is always fortunate for ourselves and others, when we are prevented from exchanging admiration for knowledge. The splendid vision that in youth haunts our idea of the poetical character, fades, upon acquaintance, into the light of common day; as the azure tints that deck the mountain's brow are lost on a nearer approach to them. It is well, according to the moral of one of the Lyrical Ballads,— "To leave Yarrow unvisited." But to leave this "face-making," and begin.—

I am a great admirer of the female writers of the present day; they appear to me like so many modern Muses. I could be in love with Mrs. Inchbald, romantic with Mrs. Radcliffe, and sarcastic with Madame D'Arblay; but they are novel-writers, and, like Audrey, may "thank the Gods for not having made them poetical." Did any one here ever read Mrs. Leicester's School? If they have not, I wish they would; there will be just time before the next three volumes of the Tales of my Landlord come out. That is not a school of affectation, but of humanity. No one can think too highly of the work, or highly enough of the author.

The first poetess I can recollect is Mrs. Barbauld, with whose works I became acquainted before those of any other author, male or female, when I was learning to spell words of one syllable in her story-books for children. I became acquainted with her poetical works long after in Enfield's Speaker; and remember being much divided in my opinion at that time, between her Ode to Spring and Collin's Ode to Evening. I wish I could repay my childish debt of gratitude in terms of appropriate praise. She is a very pretty poetess; and, to my fancy, strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of

religious controversy. She is a neat and pointed prose-writer. Her "Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations," is one of the most ingenious and sensible essays in the language. There is the same idea in one of Barrow's Sermons.

Mrs. Hannah More is another celebrated modern poetess, and I believe still living. She has written a great deal which I have never read.

Miss Baillie must make up this trio of female poets. Her tragedies and comedies, one of each to illustrate each of the passions, separately from the rest, are heresies in the dramatic art. She is a Unitarian in poetry. With her the passions are, like the French republic, one and indivisible: they are not so in nature, or in Shakspeare. Mr. Southey has, I believe, somewhere expressed an opinion, that the Basil of Miss Baillie is superior to Romeo and Juliet. I shall not stay to contradict him. On the other hand, I prefer her De Montfort, which was condemned on the stage, to some later tragedies, which have been more fortunate—to the Remorse, Bertram, and lastly, Fazio. There is in the chief character of that play a nerve, a continued unity of interest, a setness of purpose and precision of outline which John Kemble alone was capable of giving; and there is all the grace which women have in writing. In saying that De Montfort was a character which just suited Mr. Kemble, I mean to pay a compliment to both. He was not "a man of no mark or likelihood:" and what he could be supposed to do particularly well, must have a meaning in it. As to the other tragedies just mentioned, there is no reason why any common actor should not "make mouths in them at the invisible event,"—one as well as another. Having thus expressed my sense of the merits of this authoress, I must add, that her comedy of the Election, performed last summer at the Lyceum with indifferent success, appears to me the perfection of baby-house theatricals. Everything in it has such a *do-me-good* air, is so insipid and amiable. Virtue seems such a pretty playing at make-believe, and vice is such a naughty word. It is a theory

of some French author, that little girls ought not to be suffered to have dolls to play with, to call them *pretty dears*, to admire their black eyes and cherry cheeks, to lament and bewail over them if they fall down and hurt their faces, to praise them when they are good, and scold them when they are naughty. It is a school of affectation: Miss Baillie has profited of it. She treats her grown men and women as little girls treat their dolls —makes moral puppets of them, pulls the wires, and they talk virtue and act vice, according to their cue and the title prefixed to each comedy or tragedy, not from any real passions of their own, or love either of virtue or vice.

The transition from these to Mr. Rogers's Pleasures of Memory, is not far: he is a very lady-like poet. He is an elegant, but feeble writer. He wraps up obvious thoughts in a glittering cover of fine words; is full of enigmas with no meaning to them; is studiously inverted, and scrupulously far-fetched; and his verses are poetry, chiefly because no particle, line, or syllable of them reads like prose. He differs from Milton in this respect, who is accused of having inserted a number of prosaic lines in Paradise Lost. This kind of poetry, which is a more minute and inoffensive species of the Della Cruscan, is like the game of asking what one's thoughts are like. It is a tortuous, tottering, wriggling, fidgetty translation of every thing from the vulgar tongue, into all the tantalizing, teasing, tripping, lisping *mimminee-pimminee* of the highest brilliancy and fashion of poetical diction. You have nothing like truth of nature or simplicity of expression. The fastidious and languid reader is never shocked by meeting, from the rarest chance in the world, with a single homely phrase or intelligible idea. You cannot see the thought for the ambiguity of the language, the figure for the finery, the picture for the varnish. The whole is refined, and frittered away into an appearance of the most evanescent brilliancy and tremulous imbecility.—There is no other fault to be found with the Pleasures of Memory, than a want of taste and genius. The sentiments are

amiable, and the notes at the end highly interesting, particularly the one relating to the Countess Pillar (as it is called) between Appleby and Penrith, erected (as the inscription tells the thoughtful traveller) by Anne Countess of Pembroke, in the year 1648, in memory of her last parting with her good and pious mother in the same place in the year 1616—

> "To shew that power of love, how great
> Beyond all human estimate."

This story is also told in the poem, but with so many artful innuendos and tinsel words, that it is hardly intelligible; and still less does it reach the heart.

Campbell's Pleasures of Hope is of the same school, in which a painful attention is paid to the expression in proportion as there is little to express, and the decomposition of prose is substituted for the composition of poetry. How much the sense and keeping in the ideas are sacrificed to a jingle of words and epigrammatic turn of expression, may be seen in such lines as the following:— one of the characters, an old invalid, wishes to end his days under

> "Some hamlet shade, to yield his sickly form
> Health in the breeze, and shelter in the storm."

Now the antithesis here totally fails: for it is the breeze, and not the tree, or as it is quaintly expressed, *hamlet shade*, that affords health, though it is the tree that affords shelter in or from the storm. Instances of the same sort of *curiosa infelicitas* are not rare in this author. His verses on the Battle of Hohenlinden have considerable spirit and animation. His Gertrude of Wyoming is his principal performance. It is a kind of historical paraphrase of Mr. Wordsworth's poem of Ruth. It shews little power, or power enervated by extreme fastidiousness. It is

> "——— Of outward show
> Elaborate; of inward less exact."

There are painters who trust more to the setting of their pictures than to the truth of the likeness. Mr. Campbell

always seems to me to be thinking how his poetry will look when it comes to be hot-pressed on superfine wove paper, to have a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press. He is so afraid of doing wrong, of making the smallest mistake, that he does little or nothing. Lest he should wander irretrievably from the right path, he stands still. He writes according to established etiquette. He offers the Muses no violence. If he lights upon a good thought, he immediately drops it for fear of spoiling a good thing. When he launches a sentiment that you think will float him triumphantly for once to the bottom of the stanza, he stops short at the end of the first or second line, and stands shivering on the brink of beauty, afraid to trust himself to the fathomless abyss. *Tutus nimium, timidusque procellarum.* His very circumspection betrays him. The poet, as well as the woman, that deliberates, is undone. He is much like a man whose heart fails him just as he is going up in a balloon, and who breaks his neck by flinging himself out of it when it is too late. Mr. Campbell too often maims and mangles his ideas before they are full formed, to fit them to the Procrustes' bed of criticism; or strangles his intellectual offspring in the birth, lest they should come to an untimely end in the Edinburgh Review. He plays the hypercritic on himself, and starves his genius to death from a needless apprehension of a plethora. No writer who thinks habitually of the critics, either to tremble at their censures or set them at defiance, can write well. It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers.—There is one admirable simile in this poem, of the European child brought by the sooty Indian in his hand, "like morning brought by night." The love-scenes in Gertrude of Wyoming breathe a balmy voluptuousness of sentiment; but they are generally broken off in the middle; they are like the scent of a bank of violets, faint and rich, which the gale suddenly conveys in a different direction. Mr. Campbell is careful of his own reputation, and economical of the pleasures of his readers. He treats them as the fox

in the fable treated his guest the stork ; or, to use his own expression, his fine things are

"Like angels' visits, few, and far between."[1]

There is another fault in this poem, which is the mechanical structure of the fable. The most striking events occur in the shape of antitheses. The story is cut into the form of a parallelogram. There is the same systematic alternation of good and evil, of violence and repose, that there is of light and shade in a picture. The Indian, who is the chief agent in the interest of the poem, vanishes and returns after long intervals, like the periodical revolutions of the planets. He unexpectedly appears just in the nick of time, after years of absence, and without any known reason but the convenience of the author and the astonishment of the reader ; as if nature were a machine constructed on a principle of complete contrast, to produce a theatrical effect. *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus.* Mr. Campbell's savage never appears but upon great occasions, and then his punctuality is preternatural and alarming. He is the most wonderful instance on record of poetical *reliability.* The most dreadful mischiefs happen at the most mortifying moments ; and when your expectations are wound up to the highest pitch, you are sure to have them knocked on the head by a premeditated and remorseless stroke of the poet's pen. This is done so often for the convenience of the author, that in the end it ceases to be for the satisfaction of the reader.

Tom Moore is a poet of a quite different stamp. He is as heedless, gay, and prodigal of his poetical wealth, as the other is careful, reserved, and parsimonious. The genius of both is national. Mr. Moore's Muse is another Ariel, as light, as tricksy, as indefatigable, and as humane a spirit. His fancy is for ever on the wing, flutters in the gale, glitters in the sun. Every thing lives, moves, and

[1] There is the same idea in Blair's Grave.

"——— Its visits,
Like those of angels, short, and far between."

Mr. Campbell in altering the expression has spoiled it. "Few," and "far between," are the same thing.

sparkles in his poetry, while over all love waves his purple light. His thoughts are as restless, as many, and as bright as the insects that people the sun's beam. "So work the honey-bees," extracting liquid sweets from opening buds; so the butterfly expands its wings to the idle air; so the thistle's silver down is wafted over summer seas. An airy voyager on life's stream, his mind inhales the fragrance of a thousand shores, and drinks of endless pleasures under halcyon skies. Wherever his footsteps tend over the enamelled ground of fairy fiction—

> "Around him the bees in play flutter and cluster,
> And gaudy butterflies frolic around."

The fault of Mr. Moore is an exuberance of involuntary power. His facility of production lessens the effect of, and hangs as a dead weight upon, what he produces. His levity at last oppresses. The infinite delight he takes in such an infinite number of things, creates indifference in minds less susceptible of pleasure than his own. He exhausts attention by being inexhaustible. His variety cloys; his rapidity dazzles and distracts the sight. The graceful ease with which he lends himself to every subject, the genial spirit with which he indulges in every sentiment, prevents him from giving their full force to the masses of things, from connecting them into a whole. He wants intensity, strength, and grandeur. His mind does not brood over the great and permanent; it glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things, instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that "perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart." His pen, as it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion. It requires the same principle to make us thoroughly like poetry, that makes us like ourselves so well, the feeling of continued identity. The impressions of Mr. Moore's poetry are detached, desultory, and physical. Its gorgeous colours brighten and fade like the rainbow's. Its sweetness evaporates like the effluvia exhaled from beds of flowers! His gay laughing style, which relates to the immediate pleasures of love or wine,

is better than his sentimental and romantic vein. His Irish melodies are not free from affectation and a certain sickliness of pretension. His serious descriptions are apt to run into flowery tenderness. His pathos sometimes melts into a mawkish sensibility, or crystallizes into all the prettinesses of allegorical language, and glittering hardness of external imagery. But he has wit at will, and of the first quality. His satirical and burlesque poetry is his best: it is first-rate. His Twopenny Post-Bag is a perfect "nest of spicery;" where the Cayenne is not spared. The politician there sharpens the poet's pen. In this too, our bard resembles the bee—he has its honey and its sting.

Mr. Moore ought not to have written Lalla Rookh, even for three thousand guineas. His fame is worth more than that. He should have minded the advice of Fadladeen. It is not, however, a failure, so much as an evasion and a consequent disappointment of public expectation. He should have left it to others to break conventions with nations, and faith with the world. He should, at any rate, have kept his with the public. Lalla Rookh is not what people wanted to see whether Mr. Moore could do; namely, whether he could write a long epic poem. It is four short tales. The interest, however, is often high-wrought and tragic, but the execution still turns to the effeminate and voluptuous side. Fortitude of mind is the first requisite of a tragic or epic writer. Happiness of nature and felicity of genius are the pre-eminent characteristics of the bard of Erin. If he is not perfectly contented with what he is, all the world beside is. He had no temptation to risk any thing in adding to the love and admiration of his age, and more than one country.

> "Therefore to be possessed with double pomp,
> To guard a title that was rich before,
> To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
> To throw a perfume on the violet,
> To smooth the ice, or add another hue
> Unto the rainbow, or with taper light
> To seek the beauteous eye of heav'n to garnish,
> Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."

The same might be said of Mr. Moore's seeking to bind an epic crown, or the shadow of one, round his other laurels.

If Mr. Moore has not suffered enough personally, Lord Byron (judging from the tone of his writings) might be thought to have suffered too much to be a truly great poet. If Mr. Moore lays himself too open to all the various impulses of things, the outward shews of earth and sky, to every breath that blows, to every stray sentiment that crosses his fancy ; Lord Byron shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts, and buries the natural light of things in " nook monastic." The Giaour, the Corsair, Childe Harold, are all the same person, and they are apparently all himself. The everlasting repetition of one subject, the same dark ground of fiction, with the darker colours of the poet's mind spread over it, the unceasing accumulation of horrors on horror's head, steels the mind against the sense of pain, as inevitably as the unwearied Siren sounds and luxurious monotony of Mr. Moore's poetry makes it inaccessible to pleasure. Lord Byron's poetry is as morbid as Mr. Moore's is careless and dissipated. He has more depth of passion, more force and impetuosity, but the passion is always of the same unaccountable character, at once violent and sullen, fierce and gloomy. It is not the passion of a mind struggling with misfortune, or the hopelessness of its desires, but of a mind preying upon itself, and disgusted with, or indifferent to all other things. There is nothing less poetical than this sort of unaccommodating selfishness. There is nothing more repulsive than this sort of ideal absorption of all the interest of others, of the good and ills of life, in the ruling passion and moody abstraction of a single mind, as if it would make itself the centre of the universe, and there was nothing worth cherishing but its intellectual diseases. It is like a cancer, eating into the heart of poetry. But still there is power ; and power rivets attention and forces admiration. " He hath a demon : " and that is the next thing to being full of the God. His brow collects the scattered gloom : his eye

flashes livid fire that withers and consumes. But still we watch the progress of the scathing bolt with interest, and mark the ruin it leaves behind with awe. Within the contracted range of his imagination, he has great unity and truth of keeping. He chooses elements and agents congenial to his mind, the dark and glittering ocean, the frail bark hurrying before the storm, pirates and men that "house on the wild sea with wild usages." He gives the tumultuous eagerness of action, and the fixed despair of thought. In vigour of style and force of conception, he in one sense surpasses every writer of the present day. His indignant apothegms are like oracles of misanthropy. He who wishes for a "curse to kill with," may find it in Lord Byron's writings. Yet he has beauty lurking underneath his strength, tenderness sometimes joined with the phrenzy of despair. A flash of golden light sometimes follows from a stroke of his pencil, like a falling meteor. The flowers that adorn his poetry bloom over charnel-houses and the grave!

There is one subject on which Lord Byron is fond of writing, on which I wish he would not write—Buonaparte. Not that I quarrel with his writing for him or against him, but with his writing both for him and against him. What right has he to do this? Buonaparte's character, be it what else it may, does not change every hour according to his Lordship's varying humour. He is not a pipe for Fortune's finger, or for his Lordship's Muse, to play what stop she pleases on. Why should Lord Byron now laud him to the skies in the hour of his success, and then peevishly wreak his disappointment on the God of his idolatry? The man he writes of does not rise or fall with circumstances: but "looks on tempests and is never shaken." Besides, he is a subject for history, and not for poetry.

> "Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread,
> But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
> And in themselves their pride lies buried;
> For at a frown they in their glory die.
> The painful warrior, famoused for fight,
> After a thousand victories once foil'd,

Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd."

If Lord Byron will write any thing more on this hazardous theme, let him take these lines of Shakspeare for his guide, and finish them in the spirit of the original—they will then be worthy of the subject.

Walter Scott is the most popular of all the poets of the present day, and deservedly so. He describes that which is most easily and generally understood with more vivacity and effect than any body else. He has no excellences, either of a lofty or recondite kind, which lie beyond the reach of the most ordinary capacity to find out; but he has all the good qualities which all the world agree to understand. His style is clear, flowing, and transparent: his sentiments, of which his style is an easy and natural medium, are common to him with his readers. He has none of Mr. Wordsworth's *idiosyncracy*. He differs from his readers only in a greater range of knowledge and facility of expression. His poetry belongs to the class of *improvisatori* poetry. It has neither depth, height, nor breadth in it; neither uncommon strength, nor uncommon refinement of thought, sentiment, or language. It has no originality. But if this author has no research, no moving power in his own breast, he relies with the greater safety and success on the force of his subject. He selects a story such as is sure to please, full of incidents, characters, peculiar manners, costume, and scenery; and he tells it in a way that can offend no one. He never wearies or disappoints you. He is communicative and garrulous; but he is not his own hero. He never obtrudes himself on your notice to prevent your seeing the subject. What passes in the poem, passes much as it would have done in reality. The author has little or nothing to do with it. Mr. Scott has great intuitive power of fancy, great vividness of pencil in placing external objects and events before the eye. The force of his mind is picturesque, rather than *moral*. He gives more of the features of nature than the soul of passion. He conveys the distinct outlines and visible

changes in outward objects, rather than "their mortal consequences." He is very inferior to Lord Byron in intense passion, to Moore in delightful fancy, to Mr. Wordsworth in profound sentiment: but he has more picturesque power than any of them; that is, he places the objects themselves, about which *they* might feel and think, in a much more striking point of view, with greater variety of dress and attitude, and with more local truth of colouring. His imagery is Gothic and grotesque. The manners and actions have the interest and curiosity belonging to a wild country and a distant period of time. Few descriptions have a more complete reality, a more striking appearance of life and motion, than that of the warriors in the Lady of the Lake, who start up at the command of Rhoderic Dhu, from their concealment under the fern, and disappear again in an instant. The Lay of the Last Minstrel and Marmion are the first, and perhaps the best of his works. The Goblin Page, in the first of these, is a very interesting and inscrutable little personage. In reading these poems, I confess I am a little disconcerted, in turning over the page, to find Mr. Westall's pictures, which always seem *fac-similes* of the persons represented, with ancient costume and theatrical air. This may be a compliment to Mr. Westall, but it is not one to Walter Scott. The truth is, there is a modern air in the midst of the antiquarian research of Mr. Scott's poetry. It is history or tradition in masquerade. Not only the crust of old words and images is worn off with time,—the substance is grown comparatively light and worthless. The forms are old and uncouth; but the spirit is effeminate and frivolous. This is a deduction from the praise I have given to his pencil for extreme fidelity, though it has been no obstacle to its drawing-room success. He has just hit the town between the romantic and the fashionable; and between the two, secured all classes of readers on his side. In a word, I conceive that he is to the great poet, what an excellent mimic is to a great actor. There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading

his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same man that he was before. A great mind is one that moulds the minds of others. Mr. Scott has put the Border Minstrelsy and scattered traditions of the country into easy, animated verse. But the Notes to his poems are just as entertaining as the poems themselves, and his poems are only entertaining.

Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. He is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal: it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song: he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere sentiment. Of many of the Lyrical Ballads, it is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise, such as Hart-leap Well, the Banks of the Wye, Poor Susan, parts of the Leech-gatherer, the lines to a Cuckoo, to a Daisy, the Complaint, several of the Sonnets, and a hundred others of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done, or attempted. He has produced a deeper impression, and on a smaller circle, than any other of his contemporaries. His powers have been mistaken by the age, nor does he exactly understand them himself. He cannot form a whole. He has not the constructive faculty. He can give only the fine tones of thought, drawn from his mind by accident or nature, like the sounds drawn from the Æolian harp by the wandering gale.—He is totally deficient in all the machinery of poetry. His *Excursion*, taken as a whole, notwithstanding the noble materials thrown away in it, is a proof of this. The line labours, the sentiment moves slow, but the poem stands stock-still. The reader makes no way from the first line to the last. It is more than any thing in the world like Robinson Crusoe's boat, which would have been an excellent good boat, and would have carried him to the other side of the globe, but that

he could not get it out of the sand where it stuck fast. I did what little I could to help to launch it at the time, but it would not do. I am not, however, one of those who laugh at the attempts or failures of men of genius. It is not my way to cry "Long life to the conqueror." Success and desert are not with me synonymous terms; and the less Mr. Wordsworth's general merits have been understood, the more necessary is it to insist upon them. This is not the place to repeat what I have already said on the subject. The reader may turn to it in the Round Table. I do not think, however, there is any thing in the larger poem equal to many of the detached pieces in the Lyrical Ballads. As Mr. Wordsworth's poems have been little known to the public, or chiefly through garbled extracts from them, I will here give an entire poem (one that has always been a favourite with me), that the reader may know what it is that the admirers of this author find to be delighted with in his poetry. Those who do not feel the beauty and force of it, may save themselves the trouble of inquiring farther.

HART-LEAP WELL.

"The knight had ridden down from Wensley moor
With the slow motion of a summer's cloud;
He turned aside towards a vassal's door,
And, 'Bring another horse!' he cried aloud.

'Another horse!'—That shout the vassal heard,
And saddled his best steed, a comely gray;
Sir Walter mounted him; he was the third
Which he had mounted on that glorious day.

Joy sparkled in the prancing courser's eyes:
The horse and horseman are a happy pair;
But, though Sir Walter like a falcon flies,
There is a doleful silence in the air.

A rout this morning left Sir Walter's hall,
That as they galloped made the echoes roar;
But horse and man are vanished, one and all;
Such race, I think, was never seen before.

Sir Walter, restless as a veering wind,
Calls to the few tired dogs that yet remain:
Brach, Swift, and Music, noblest of their kind,
Follow, and up the weary mountain strain.

The knight hallooed, he chid and cheered them on
With suppliant gestures and upbraidings stern;
But breath and eye-sight fail; and, one by one,
The dogs are stretched among the mountain fern.

Where is the throng, the tumult of the race?
The bugles that so joyfully were blown?
—This chase it looks not like an earthly chase;
Sir Walter and the hart are left alone.

The poor hart toils along the mountain side;
I will not stop to tell how far he fled,
Nor will I mention by what death he died;
But now the knight beholds him lying dead.

Dismounting then, he leaned against a thorn;
He had no follower, dog, nor man, nor boy:
He neither smacked his whip, nor blew his horn,
But gazed upon the spoil with silent joy.

Close to the thorn on which Sir Walter leaned,
Stood his dumb partner in this glorious act;
Weak as a lamb the hour that it is yeaned;
And foaming like a mountain cataract.

Upon his side the hart was lying stretched:
His nose half-touched a spring beneath a hill,
And with the last deep groan his breath had fetched
The waters of the spring were trembling still.

And now, too happy for repose or rest,
(Was never man in such a joyful case!)
Sir Walter walked all round, north, south, and west,
And gazed, and gazed upon that darling place.

And climbing up the hill—(it was at least
Nine roods of sheer ascent) Sir Walter found,
Three several hoof-marks which the hunted beast
Had left imprinted on the verdant ground.

Sir Walter wiped his face and cried, 'Till now
Such sight was never seen by living eyes:
Three leaps have borne him from this lofty brow,
Down to the very fountain where he lies.

I'll build a pleasure-house upon this spot,
And a small arbour, made for rural joy;
'Twill be the traveller's shed, the pilgrim's cot,
A place of love for damsels that are coy.

A cunning artist will I have to frame
A bason for that fountain in the dell;
And they, who do make mention of the same
From this day forth, shall call it HART-LEAP WELL.

And, gallant brute! to make thy praises known,
Another monument shall here be raised;
Three several pillars, each a rough-hewn stone,
And planted where thy hoofs the turf have grazed.

And, in the summer-time when days are long,
I will come hither with my paramour;
And with the dancers, and the minstrel's song,
We will make merry in that pleasant bower.

Till the foundations of the mountains fail,
My mansion with its arbour shall endure;—
The joy of them who till the fields of Swale,
And them who dwell among the woods of Ure!'

Then home he went, and left the hart, stone-dead,
With breathless nostrils stretched above the spring.
—Soon did the knight perform what he had said,
And far and wide the fame thereof did ring.

Ere thrice the moon into her port had steered,
A cup of stone received the living well;
Three pillars of rude stone Sir Walter reared,
And built a house of pleasure in the dell.

And near the fountain, flowers of stature tall
With trailing plants and trees were intertwined,—
Which soon composed a little sylvan hall,
A leafy shelter from the sun and wind.

And thither, when the summer-days were long,
Sir Walter journeyed with his paramour;
And with the dancers and the minstrel's song
Made merriment within that pleasant bower.

The knight, Sir Walter, died in course of time,
And his bones lie in his paternal vale.—
But there is matter for a second rhyme,
And I to this would add another tale."

PART SECOND.

"The moving accident is not my trade:
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts:
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.

As I from Hawes to Richmond did repair,
It chanced that I saw standing in a dell
Three aspens at three corners of a square,
And one, not four yards distant, near a well.

What this imported I could ill divine :
And, pulling now the rein my horse to stop,
I saw three pillars standing in a line,
The last stone pillar on a dark hill-top.

The trees were gray, with neither arms nor head ;
Half-wasted the square mound of tawny green ;
So that you just might say, as then I said,
'Here in old time the hand of man hath been.'

I looked upon the hill both far and near,
More doleful place did never eye survey ;
It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
And Nature here were willing to decay.

I stood in various thoughts and fancies lost,
When one, who was in shepherd's garb attired,
Came up the hollow :—Him did I accost,
And what this place might be I then inquired.

The shepherd stopped, and that same story told
Which in my former rhyme I have rehearsed.
'A jolly place,' said he, 'in times of old !
But something ails it now ; the spot is curst.

You see these lifeless stumps of aspen wood—
Some say that they are beeches, others elms—
These were the bower ; and here a mansion stood,
The finest palace of a hundred realms !

The arbour does its own condition tell ;
You see the stones, the fountain, and the stream ;
But as to the great lodge ! you might as well
Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream.

There's neither dog nor heifer, horse nor sheep,
Will wet his lips within that cup of stone ;
And oftentimes, when all are fast asleep,
This water doth send forth a dolorous groan.

Some say that here a murder has been done,
And blood cries out for blood : but, for my part,
I've guessed, when I've been sitting in the sun,
That it was all for that unhappy hart.

What thoughts must through the creature's brain have passed !
Even from the top-most stone, upon the steep,
Are but three bounds—and look, Sir, at this last—
—O Master ! it has been a cruel leap.

For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race ;
And in my simple mind we cannot tell
What cause the hart might have to love this place,
And come and make his death-bed near the well.

Here on the grass perhaps asleep he sank,
Lulled by this fountain in the summer-tide;
This water was perhaps the first he drank
When he had wandered from his mother's side.

In April here beneath the scented thorn
He heard the birds their morning carols sing;
And he, perhaps, for aught we know, was born
Not half a furlong from the self-same spring.

But now here's neither grass nor pleasant shade;
The sun on drearier hollow never shone;
So will it be, as I have often said,
Till trees, and stones, and fountain all are gone.'

'Gray-headed Shepherd, thou hast spoken well;
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine:
This beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

The Being, that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep, and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

The pleasure-house is dust:—behind, before,
This is no common waste, no common gloom;
But Nature, in due course of time, once more
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves these objects to a slow decay,
That what we are, and have been, may be known;
But at the coming of the milder day,
These monuments shall all be overgrown.

One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shews, and what conceals,
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels."

Mr. Wordsworth is at the head of that which has been denominated the Lake school of poetry; a school which, with all my respect for it, I do not think sacred from criticism or exempt from faults, of some of which faults I shall speak with becoming frankness; for I do not see that the liberty of the press ought to be shackled, or freedom of speech curtailed, to screen either its revolutionary or renegado extravagances. This school of poetry had its origin in the French Revolution, or rather in those sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution;

and which sentiments and opinions were indirectly imported into this country in translations from the German about that period. Our poetical literature had, towards the close of the last century, degenerated into the most trite, insipid, and mechanical of all things, in the hands of the followers of Pope and the old French school of poetry. It wanted something to stir it up, and it found that something in the principles and events of the French Revolution. From the impulse it thus received, it rose at once from the most servile imitation and tamest common-place, to the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox. The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to many persons as startling, as the change in politics, with which it went hand in hand. There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people. According to the prevailing notions, all was to be natural and new. Nothing that was established was to be tolerated. All the common-place figures of poetry, tropes, allegories, personifications, with the whole heathen mythology, were instantly discarded ; a classical allusion was considered as a piece of antiquated foppery ; capital letters were no more allowed in print, than letters-patent of nobility were permitted in real life ; kings and queens were dethroned from their rank and station in legitimate tragedy or epic poetry, as they were decapitated elsewhere ; rhyme was looked upon as a relic of the feudal system, and regular metre was abolished along with regular government. Authority and fashion, elegance or arrangement, were hooted out of countenance, as pedantry and prejudice. Every one did that which was good in his own eyes. The object was to reduce all things to an absolute level ; and a singularly affected and outrageous simplicity prevailed in dress and manners, style and sentiment. A striking effect produced where it was least expected, something new and original, no matter whether good, bad, or indifferent, whether mean or lofty, extravagant or childish, was all that was aimed at, or considered as compatible with sound philosophy and an age of reason. The licentiousness grew extreme : Coryate's

Crudities were nothing to it. The world was to be turned topsy-turvy ; and poetry, by the good will of our Adam-wits, was to share its fate and begin *de novo*. It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world and of letters ; and the Deucalions, who were to perform this feat of regeneration, were the present poet-laureat and the two authors of the Lyrical Ballads. The Germans, who made heroes of robbers, and honest women of cast-off mistresses, had already exhausted the extravagant and marvellous in sentiment and situation : our native writers adopted a wonderful simplicity of style and matter. The paradox they set out with was, that all things are by nature equally fit subjects for poetry ; or that if there is any preference to be given, those that are the meanest and most unpromising are the best, as they leave the greatest scope for the unbounded stores of thought and fancy in the writer's own mind. Poetry had with them "neither buttress nor coigne of vantage to make its pendant bed and procreant cradle." It was not "born so high : its aiery buildeth in the cedar's top, and dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun." It grew like a mushroom out of the ground ; or was hidden in it like a truffle, which it required a particular sagacity and industry to find out and dig up. They founded the new school on a principle of sheer humanity, on pure nature void of art. It could not be said of these sweeping reformers and dictators in the republic of letters, that "in their train walked crowns and crownets ; that realms and islands, like plates, dropt from their pockets : " but they were surrounded, in company with the Muses, by a mixed rabble of idle apprentices and Botany Bay convicts, female vagrants, gipsies, meek daughters in the family of Christ, of idiot boys and mad mothers, and after them "owls and night-ravens flew." They scorned "degrees, priority, and place, insisture, course, proportion, season, form, office, and custom in all line of order : "—the distinctions of birth, the vicissitudes of fortune, did not enter into their abstracted, lofty, and levelling calculation of human nature. He who was more than man, with them was none. They claimed

kindred only with the commonest of the people : peasants, pedlars, and village-barbers were their oracles and bosom friends. Their poetry, in the extreme to which it professedly tended, and was in effect carried, levels all distinctions of nature and society ; has "no figures nor no fantasies," which the prejudices of superstition or the customs of the world draw in the brains of men ; "no trivial fond records" of all that has existed in the history of past ages ; it has no adventitious pride, pomp, or circumstance, to set it off ; "the marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe ;" neither tradition, reverence, nor ceremony, "that to great ones 'longs :" it breaks in pieces the golden images of poetry, and defaces its armorial bearings, to melt them down in the mould of common humanity or of its own upstart self-sufficiency. They took the same method in their new-fangled "metre ballad-mongering" scheme, which Rousseau did in his prose paradoxes—of exciting attention by reversing the established standards of opinion and estimation in the world. They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature, as he was for bringing society back to the savage state : so that the only thing remarkable left in the world by this change, would be the persons who had produced it. A thorough adept in this school of poetry and philanthropy is jealous of all excellence but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject ; for he would have it all proceed from his own power and originality of mind. Such a one is slow to admire any thing that is admirable ; feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in any thing grand, no beauty in any thing beautiful. He tolerates only what he himself creates ; he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him, with "the bare trees and mountains bare, and grass in the green field." He sees nothing but himself and the universe. He hates all greatness and all pretensions to it, whether well or ill-founded. His egotism is in some respects a madness ; for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in any one to suppose

that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art; he hates chemistry, he hates conchology; he hates Voltaire; he hates Sir Isaac Newton; he hates wisdom; he hates wit; he hates metaphysics, which he says are unintelligible, and yet he would be thought to understand them; he hates prose; he hates all poetry but his own; he hates the dialogues in Shakspeare; he hates music, dancing, and painting; he hates Rubens, he hates Rembrandt; he hates Raphael, he hates Titian; he hates Vandyke; he hates the antique; he hates the Apollo Belvidere; he hates the Venus of Medicis. This is the reason that so few people take an interest in his writings, because he takes an interest in nothing that others do!—The effect has been perceived as something odd; but the cause or principle has never been distinctly traced to its source before, as far as I know. The proofs are to be found every where—in Mr. Southey's Botany Bay Eclogues, in his book of Songs and Sonnets, his Odes and Inscriptions, so well parodied in the Anti-Jacobin Review, in his Joan of Arc, and last, though not least, in his Wat Tyler:

> "When Adam delved, and Eve span,
> Where was then the gentleman?"

(—or the poet laureat either, we may ask?)—In Mr. Coleridge's Ode to an Ass's Foal, in his Lines to Sarah, his Religious Musings; and in his and Mr. Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, *passim*.

Of Mr. Southey's larger epics, I have but a faint recollection at this distance of time, but all that I remember of them is mechanical and extravagant, heavy and superficial. His affected, disjointed style is well imitated in the Rejected Addresses. The difference between him and Sir Richard Blackmore seems to be, that the one is heavy and the other light, the one solemn and the other pragmatical, the one phlegmatic and the other flippant; and that there is no Gay in the present time to give a Catalogue Raisonné of the performances of the living undertaker of epics. Kehama is a loose sprawling figure, such as we see cut out of wood or paper, and

pulled or jerked with wire or thread, to make sudden and surprising motions, without meaning, grace, or nature in them. By far the best of his works are some of his shorter personal compositions, in which there is an ironical mixture of the quaint and serious, such as his lines on a picture of Gaspar Poussin, the fine tale of Gualberto, his Description of a Pig, and the Holly-tree, which is an affecting, beautiful, and modest retrospect on his own character. May the aspiration with which it concludes be fulfilled![1]—But the little he has done of true and sterling excellence, is overloaded by the quantity of indifferent matter which he turns out every year, "prosing or versing," with equally mechanical and

[1] "O reader! hast thou ever stood to see
The Holly Tree?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives
Its glossy leaves,
Ordered by an intelligence so wise
As might confound the Atheist's sophistries.
Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen
Wrinkled and keen;
No grazing cattle through their prickly round
Can reach to wound;
But as they grow where nothing is to fear,
Smooth and unarm'd the pointless leaves appear.
I love to view these things with curious eyes,
And moralize;
And in the wisdom of the Holly Tree
Can emblems see
Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,
Such as may profit in the after time.
So, though abroad perchance I might appear
Harsh and austere,
To those who on my leisure would intrude
Reserved and rude,
Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.
And should my youth, as youth is apt I know,
Some harshness show,
All vain asperities I day by day
Would wear away,
Till the smooth temper of my age should be
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

irresistible facility. His Essays, or political and moral disquisitions, are not so full of original matter as Montaigne's. They are second or third rate compositions in that class.

It remains that I should say a few words of Mr. Coleridge; and there is no one who has a better right to say what he thinks of him than I have. "Is there here any dear friend of Cæsar? To him I say, that Brutus's love to Cæsar was no less than his." But no matter.—His Ancient Mariner is his most remarkable performance, and the only one that I could point out to any one as giving an adequate idea of his great natural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to "conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, present, and to come." His tragedies (for he has written two) are not answerable to it; they are, except a few poetical passages, drawling sentiment and metaphysical jargon. He has no genuine dramatic talent. There is one fine passage in his Christobel, that which contains the description of the quarrel between Sir Leoline and Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine, who had been friends in youth.

"Alas! they had been friends in youth,
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain:
And thus it chanc'd as I divine,
With Ronald and Sir Leoline.

And as when all the summer trees are seen
So bright and green,
The Holly leaves their fadeless hues display
Less bright than they,
But when the bare and wintry woods we see,
What then so cheerful as the Holly Tree?
So serious should my youth appear among
The thoughtless throng,
So would I seem amid the young and gay
More grave than they,
That in my age as cheerful I might be
As the green winter of the Holly Tree."—

Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother,
And parted ne'er to meet again!
But neither ever found another
To free the hollow heart from paining—

They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder:
A dreary sea now flows between,
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away I ween
The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline a moment's space
Stood gazing on the damsel's face;
And the youthful lord of Tryermaine
Came back upon his heart again."

It might seem insidious if I were to praise his ode entitled Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, as an effusion of high poetical enthusiasm, and strong political feeling. His Sonnet to Schiller conveys a fine compliment to the author of the Robbers, and an equally fine idea of the state of youthful enthusiasm in which he composed it.

"Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black Horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.

Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstacy!"

His *Conciones ad Populum*, Watchman, &c. are dreary trash. Of his Friend, I have spoken the truth elsewhere. But I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt any thing. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but *that* he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew.

His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! . . . That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.

> "What though the radiance which was once so bright,
> Be now for ever taken from my sight,
> Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flow'r;
> I do not grieve, but rather find
> Strength in what remains behind;
> In the primal sympathy,
> Which having been, must ever be;
> In the soothing thoughts that spring
> Out of human suffering;
> In years that bring the philosophic mind!"—

I have thus gone through the task I intended, and have come at last to the level ground. I have felt my subject gradually sinking from under me as I advanced, and have been afraid of ending in nothing. The interest has unavoidably decreased at almost every successive step of the progress, like a play that has its catastrophe in the first or second act. This, however, I could not help. I have done as well as I could.

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GLASGOW: PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO.

Hazlitt, W.

Characters of Shakespeare's Plays

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